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# AGNOSTICISM

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# AGNOSTICISM

BY

ROBERT FLINT

D.D., LL.D., F.R.S.E.

CORRESPONDING MEMBER OF THE INSTITUTE OF FRANCE  
HONORARY MEMBER OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF PALERMO; AND  
PROFESSOR IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

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# AGNOSTICISM

## CHAPTER I

### THE NATURE OF AGNOSTICISM

#### I. ORIGIN, ORIGINAL APPLICATION, AND DEFECTS OF THE TERM

OUR study of agnosticism may appropriately begin with an inquiry as to the nature or kind of thought so designated.

What, then, ought we to mean by agnosticism? The name itself should so far help us to an answer; and even if it be found not directly of itself to aid us much, we may be indirectly profited by an examination of it.

It is a comparatively new term, being little more than thirty years old. It was preceded by the word "agnostic," as to the date of the invention of which we have very precise information.

According to Mr. R. H. Hutton, this latter word was "suggested by Professor Huxley, at a party held previous to the formation of the now defunct Metaphysical Society, at Mr. James Knowles's house on Clapham Common, one evening in 1869, in my



## THE NATURE OF AGNOSTICISM

hearing. He took it from St. Paul's mention of the altar to 'the unknown God.'"<sup>1</sup>

Professor Huxley's own account of the matter is as follows: "When I reached intellectual maturity and began to ask myself whether I was an atheist, a theist, or a pantheist; a materialist or an idealist; a Christian or a freethinker, I found that the more I learned and reflected the less ready was the answer, until at last I came to the conclusion that I had neither art nor part with any of these denominations except the last. The one thing in which most of these good people were agreed was the one thing in which I differed from them. They were quite sure that they had attained a certain 'gnosis'—had, more or less successfully, solved the problem of existence; while I was quite sure that I had not, and had a pretty strong conviction that the problem was insoluble. And with Hume and Kant on my side, I could not think myself presumptuous in holding fast by that opinion. . . . This was my situation when I had the good fortune to find a place among the members of that remarkable confraternity of antagonists, long since deceased, but of green and pious memory, the Metaphysical Society. Every variety of philosophical and theological opinion was represented there, and expressed itself with entire openness; most of my colleagues were *-ists* of one sort or another; and however kind and friendly they might be, I, the man without a rag of label to cover himself with, could not fail to have some of the

<sup>1</sup> Murray's *New English Dictionary*, s.v.

## HISTORY OF THE TERM

uneasy feelings which must have beset the historical fox when, after leaving the trap in which his tail remained, he presented himself to his normally elongated companions. So I took thought, and invented what I conceived to be the appropriate title of 'agnostic.' It came into my head as suggestively antithetic to the 'gnostic' of Church history, who professed to know so much about the very things of which I was ignorant; and I took the earliest opportunity of parading it at our Society, to show that I, too, had a tail, like the other foxes. To my great satisfaction, the term took; and when the *Spectator* had stood godfather to it, any suspicion in the minds of respectable people, that its parentage might have awakened, was, of course, completely lulled. That is the history of the terms 'agnostic' and 'agnosticism.' " <sup>1</sup>

The foregoing statements of Mr. Hutton and Professor Huxley well deserve to be borne in mind, but they may also perhaps be usefully supplemented by the following remarks.

1. When Professor Huxley took the term "agnostic" from St. Paul's mention of the altar to "the unknown God," he did not adhere very closely to the original. That was ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ, not ἀγνωστικῷ θεῷ. There is a Greek adjective γνωστικός, but not an ἀγνωστικός—only an ἀγνώς and ἀγνωστος. It was contrary to Greek usage to terminate with ἶκος a word which commenced with *alpha privativum*. Hence the words "agnostic" and "agnosticism" are,

<sup>1</sup> Huxley's *Collected Essays*, vol. v. pp. 239, 240.

## THE NATURE OF AGNOSTICISM

linguistically regarded, not unobjectionable. Their abnormal character did not prevent their being readily adopted in Britain; but it may have been one of the reasons which caused them to spread but slowly in France and Germany.<sup>1</sup> They failed, so far as I am aware, to receive naturalisation into any continental language until about twenty years after their invention in England.

2. The words referred to are of but limited intrinsic value. They are not indispensable for any purpose. "Sceptic" and "scepticism," employed in their universally recognised and only philosophical signification, would have served Professor Huxley just as well, even for the "label" or "tail" of which he naturally felt the need among his friendly adversaries of the Metaphysical Society, as "agnostic" and "agnosticism." Scepticism is a very old *-ism*, and quite as respectable as most of the other *-isms* which, we are told, were represented in the Metaphysical Society. It has had not only a lengthened, but, on the whole, an influential, useful, and brilliant history. It has had among its adherents many great intellects and many estimable characters. The term "scepticism" conveys in itself no unfavourable moral or religious implication; and although it must be admitted that it has acquired an offensive connotation which is certainly a disadvantage, the term "agnosticism" has, during its brief span of existence, unfortunately acquired just the same connotation. In all probability any other term devised to express the

<sup>1</sup> Appendix, Note 1.

## HUXLEY'S EXPLANATION

same import would have fared no better. "Scepticism" and "agnosticism" are not exactly equivalent terms,—do not mean precisely the same thing; but they denote or indicate the same thing, and do so as a whole, although each points specially as it were to a different side of that thing. "Scepticism" refers more clearly and distinctly to the spirit or method and "agnosticism" to the outcome or result of the tendency or phase of thought which is their common object, but either term may do duty for the other fairly well so long as they are philosophically employed; and, in fact, the two words are about as nearly synonymous as any two words can be expected to be which refer to any comprehensive or complex phenomenon.

3. "The title of 'agnostic,'" writes Professor Huxley, "came into my head as suggestively antithetic to the 'gnostic' of Church history, who professed to know so much about the very things of which I was ignorant." Just so. But what does that amount to? Is it not that "agnostic" is a name derived from a nickname, a title of honour assumed in antithesis to a designation of contempt? And is not the legitimacy of the origin of a name so derived and the right to use a title so assumed far from apparent? The terms "atheist," "theist," "pantheist," "materialist," and "idealist," are terms much more serviceable, and much less objectionable, than "freethinker" is, or than "agnostic" must be if understood as antithetic to the "gnostic" of Church history. So understood "agnostic" implies

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that all except agnostics are pretenders to a knowledge which they do not possess, while it does not give the least indication as to what knowledge they profess to possess, just as "freethinker" implies that those who do not think as he does who so calls himself is a servile thinker, while it gives no indication of wherein the freedom assumed differs from the servility alleged. So understood it could not fairly differentiate Professor Huxley from any of his colleagues in the Metaphysical Society. None of them would have admitted that they were gnostics or declined to maintain that they were anti-agnostics. Nobody can be expected to acknowledge that he is a pretender to a knowledge which he does not possess, as every one would do who called himself, or allowed himself to be called, a gnostic. The use of *gnos* in *gnosticism* and *agnosticism* to mean not *gnosis* or *knowledge* but the *illusion of it* or *false claim to it* is essentially unfair. No one will consent to bear the name of gnostic or admit that he holds a gnostic creed in that sense. The *the-* in *theism*, *atheism*, and *pantheism* alike really signifying *theos* or *God*, and the *materia* in *materialism* and the *idea* in *idealism* being both used in their ordinary and accepted sense, the adherents of any of these *-isms* will allow that they belong to that *-ism* and profess their readiness to maintain what is distinctive in its creed.

4. Why did Huxley not give to the terms which he invented their proper signification? Obviously because they would not then have meant what he wished them to mean. By professing himself an

## DEFECTS OF THE TERM

agnostic he did not desire or intend to attribute to himself ignorance of any kind of knowledge or inability to acquire any kind of knowledge. In advocating the claims of what he termed agnosticism he was not seeking to recommend a theory of universal nescience or of any kind of nescience which could be dispelled. The terms agnostic and agnosticism naturally mean in themselves what he did not mean by them, and even the very opposite of what he meant by them. "Know-nothingism" is a fair enough rendering of the meaning of the word agnosticism, although it utterly misrepresents Huxley's idea of what the word should denote.

5. Further, Huxley's account of the invention of the terms under consideration appears to recognise a right on the part of the agnostic to reject only metaphysics and theology. The possibility or legitimacy of agnostically treating the deliverances of sense and the processes and conclusions of science is not contemplated. But that is a defect. The genus must include all the species. The term agnosticism, like the term scepticism, cannot with propriety be limited to any particular class or classes of the theories which question or reject what claims to be knowledge. If a man be merely a metaphysical or theological or a metaphysical and theological agnostic, he is, of course, fully entitled to describe himself as what he is; but not to deny to others the right to be and to designate themselves scientific agnostics, or to assume that scientific agnosticism, in the sense of scepticism as to the certainty of science, is less legitimate and



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rational than the agnosticism which he himself professes.

6. No one probably will maintain that the words agnostic and agnosticism have owed their favourable reception in this country entirely to their intrinsic merits. Obviously they have also owed it in some degree to their being rather imposing and seductive words which carry with them an air of learning and profundity. The man who calls himself an agnostic implicitly claims to be no common man, but a philosopher, and even a philosopher so deep and subtle as to entitle him to despise the great mass of ordinary philosophy and of ordinary conviction. But not a few of those who call themselves agnostics have plainly no other claim than that they do so call themselves to be deemed philosophers, or to have thought at all on so abstruse a subject as the conditions and capabilities of cognition. Of course, this consideration is put forward merely to explain in part the popularity of the terms agnostic and agnosticism. It is in no way implied to have had any influence on the leaders of agnosticism—on the writers of books or essays in defence of agnosticism—on any of those on whom I may have critically to comment as representatives of agnosticism. It must not be forgotten, however, that agnosticism, like other causes and systems, has adherents of very different quality.

Again, a considerable number of persons were glad to assume the name of agnostics in the hope that they would, in consequence, not be named atheists, or at least from the wish to be able to apply to themselves

## TRIBUTE TO HUXLEY

another designation than one which they felt to be unjust and opprobrious. Their hope, I imagine, has not been realised. The result of an atheist calling himself an agnostic almost inevitably is that other people call him an agnostic atheist, and so he has two hard names thrown at him instead of one. As to the wish, most certainly a man who is merely an agnostic is entitled to protest against the injustice of being spoken of as an atheist. On the other hand, if a man be really an atheist in the ordinary meaning of the term he has no right to claim to be regarded merely an agnostic, and by doing so he necessarily spreads and confirms the very error against which he protests—the confusion of agnosticism with atheism. Aversion to the word atheism has undoubtedly favoured the diffusion of the word agnosticism, but it has unfortunately also contributed largely to its misapplication.

The criticism in which I have thus far indulged may seem to some of my readers rather hypercritical; but not, I am persuaded, to any one who adequately recognises the importance of entering on the study of our subject with as clear and correct an idea of what it really is as he is able to form. No one anxious to judge fairly and accurately of the character and claims of agnosticism will regret the time which he spends in careful reflection on the terms employed to denote it, or deem any criticism of these terms hypercriticism simply because of its strictness or severity. The man who has only a vague or false conception of the meaning and implications of the word agnosti-

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cism must have also hazy and confused notions and erroneous and unreasonable views of the thing itself.

Whatever faults may be found in my own observations regarding it have certainly not arisen from want of appreciation of its inventor. Although decidedly dissenting from certain opinions of the late Professor Huxley, I have always cordially admired both his genius and character,—his great gifts as a scientist and man of letters, his extraordinary skill and lucidity as a teacher, whether employing as his instrument the written word or the living voice, his public spirit and political independence, his fairness in controversy even when at the hottest, his splendid courage, his transparent truthfulness, his contempt for mean aims and devices, and his strenuous, continuous, and self-sacrificing devotion to the law of duty. Great Britain may well be proud to have had such a son as Thomas H. Huxley. I must reject any view of his which seems to me erroneous; but the fact of a view being his can never, I feel sure, be among my motives or reasons for rejecting it.

### II. AGNOSTICISM AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL THEORY. EQUIVALENT TO PHILOSOPHICAL SCEPTICISM

Real as are the difficulties connected with the use of the terms agnostic and agnosticism, I do not regret their invention. Nor, although they seem to me to be virtually equivalent to sceptic and scepticism, do I consider them worthless. That Professor Huxley in

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becoming their father, and Mr. Hutton in becoming their godfather, fully realised what they were doing is, I think, very doubtful. But I admit that, on the whole, they have thereby done more good than harm; that it is not entirely without reason that the words in question have become current intellectual coin; that they are by no means entirely superfluous; that a definite value can be assigned to them; that they may be so employed as to facilitate the operations of genuine thought. It would be much to be regretted were it otherwise, for obviously we cannot get rid of them now. They are in such general use that it would be sheer folly to attempt to drive them out of circulation. All that can reasonably be done is to endeavour to give them the least ambiguous and most appropriate meanings we can; to endeavour to get them used as generally as possible only with those meanings; and at the least to make it plain how we are ourselves resolved to use them, and why. This is the task now immediately before us.

The words under consideration are in themselves, or etymologically, ambiguous. Had there been such a Greek term as *ἄγνωστικός*, it would have meant, like *ἄγνωστος*, unknowing, or unknown, or unknowable; just as *γνωστικός* signifies knowing, known, or knowable. It would have referred, that is to say, to a subject, or an object, or a possibility; might have been applied to a person because ignorant, to a thing because obscure, unheard of, or forgotten, and to the unsearchable, undiscoverable.

But a knowing subject is quite distinct from a

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known object, and actual knowing and the actually known are quite distinct from possible knowing and the knowable. Similarly distinct are the unknowing, the unknown, and the unknowable. While, then, agnosticism, if its meaning is to have any connection with the derivation of its name, must negate knowledge in one of these relations, it also must, if it is not to be essentially ambiguous and misleading, directly negate them in only one of them.

In which of them should it be? The answer is obvious. No sane man will waste his time in devising any theory as to the limits of actual knowing and the actually known. These limits are individual, incidental, and variable; different for every person; changing with every hour; the same in no two stages of a life, states of a society, or ages of time. They are so manifestly indeterminable that no one has ever been so foolish as to attempt to determine them.

But there is a question as to the limits of knowledge which is far from foolish—which underlies all religion and science—which is fundamental in philosophy—which it is a main part of the business of philosophy to deal with. It is the question, What are the limits of knowledge inherent in the very constitution and laws of the human intellect? What can man, from the very nature of his powers of cognition, not know, and what, with these powers, may he hope to know?

That is the question to which agnosticism is an answer—and the only question. All agnosticism is there, in the nature of its answer. Much else

## AGNOSTICISM A THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

may be associated with it, but whatever properly belongs to it is included in its response to the aforesaid question. It is a view or theory as to what man can and cannot know—as to the inherent and constitutive limits of human cognition.

We know, then, so far what agnosticism is. It is a theory as to the limits of human knowledge. And knowing this, we know what is very important for us in our present undertaking clearly and fully to realise. We know that we are to have to do with a theory which, in whatever form it may present itself, and however erroneous it may seem to us in various or all of its forms to be, is entitled to be treated by us with seriousness and respect. From its very nature it is not an intellectual caprice or superficial opinion or vulgar prejudice. On the contrary, it is an answer to the most rational, the most comprehensive, and the most important question which man as an intellectual being can ask himself. To fail in answering the question aright is no disgrace, for the question is a profound and very difficult one. To try to answer it is of itself honourable, and a sure sign of mental superiority. I hope to bear this in mind from the beginning to the end of my task. The only persons whom I mean to call, or deem entitled to call themselves, agnostics, are men of thought and talent, endowed with the insight and faculty which enable them to form an independent judgment on the most profound, far-reaching, and practically influential of philosophical problems; and I desire to treat them with the respect to which such men are entitled.



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Agnosticism, however, cannot be merely what has just been stated. Philosophers of all kinds and schools now admit the necessity of having clear views of the nature and limits of knowledge. The chief revolutions in the history of philosophy have been those which turned on the answers given by Socrates and Plato, Descartes, Locke, and Kant, to the question, What can man know? And at the present day philosophers of every shade and tendency of thought are at one in seeking to base their systems on some doctrine of cognition. They are all more or less epistemologists. They are not all, however, agnostics. Agnostics compose even a small minority among them. While, then, to say that agnosticism is a theory as to the limits of knowledge—a theory, as the etymology of the name itself indicates, negative of ability, and consequently affirmative of inability, to know—is true so far as it goes, it obviously falls short of defining agnosticism. It does not distinguish it from non-agnostic and anti-agnostic theories. It gives us its generic notion, but leaves us without its specific notion. Its differentia has still to be found.

What is it? What kind of theory as to the limits of human knowledge is agnosticism? This question may very probably not appear difficult of an answer either to agnostics or their opponents, but it is hopeless to expect that agnostics and their opponents can agree as to what the answer should be. The more clearly this is seen the better. Nothing but confusion and error can follow from those who hold opposite

## OF CLASSES OF DEFINITION

views of the nature of anything attempting either to start from or to arrive at the same definition of it. So long as they take entirely opposite views of it, they ought to define it in opposite ways. Wherever men are disputing not ignorantly and vaguely but from clear and definite conviction, instead of its being, as is often said, their first duty to come to agreement as to the definition of the subject in dispute, that is manifestly impossible, and their real duty obviously is to state clearly and explicitly their opposite views. But that must be equivalent to giving opposing definitions. And the whole aim of the argumentation of each disputant must necessarily be to show that his definition is the right one, and his opponent's definition a wrong one.

I am not laying down, it will be observed, a general rule of definition, but one limited to a class of definitions,—definitions of things as to the very natures of which there is a direct and distinct contrariety of views. It does not apply, for example, to mathematical or empirical definitions—definitions, say, of geometrical figures or of species of plants or animals—for in regard to these there is agreement both as to the generic and specific character of the things to which they relate. But it applies to all definitions of things of which the very differentia seems to one class of persons to be a truth, a virtue, a grace, a right mean, and to another class an error, a vice, a deformity, an excess or defect; or, in other words, to all definitions of things, as to the natures of which plainly contrary logical, ethical, or æsthetic judgments are

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held. Intelligent and serious antagonists cannot reasonably be expected to agree in the acceptance and use of definitions of this order.

I have elsewhere had occasion to insist on this truth when treating of socialism.<sup>1</sup> An enlightened and convinced opponent and an enlightened and convinced adherent of socialism cannot agree in their definitions of it. If the former did not believe socialism to be a theory of society in which the rights and liberties of individuals are sacrificed to the demands of the community, he would not be an opponent of it; if the latter did not suppose it to be a system in which the community would only exercise a just and reasonable control over individuals, he would not be an adherent of it. They ought to agree, therefore, to differ in their definitions; and each ought to feel himself bound to show that his definition is alone justified by the relevant facts or instances. If, instead of this, they are led by the logical superstition as to the necessity of disputants starting with the same definitions to strive to devise a definition of socialism in which they think they may agree, what will happen? Just what has happened to a deplorable extent: time and thought will be wasted in devising definitions either uselessly vague—so vague that there is no indication of the differentia of socialism in them—or hurtfully equivocal, the socialist having managed to imply, without expressly asserting, approval, and the non-socialist disapproval, of socialism, but no more. All such definitions are hin-

<sup>1</sup> Author's *Socialism*, ch. i.

## AGNOSTIC DEFINITION OF AGNOSTICISM

drances to clear and honest reasoning. So far as my acquaintance with definitions of socialism goes the great majority of them may be placed under one or other of these two heads.

Now the differentia—the distinctive characteristic—of agnosticism can only be, in the view of every one who is not an agnostic, that as a theory of the limits of knowledge it represents these limits as more contracted than they really are. In other words, from any non-agnostic standpoint, agnosticism must seem to be the theory of knowledge which ends in doubt or disbelief of some or all of the powers of knowing possessed by the human mind. Such is agnosticism as I understand it; and it is, I think, what every one not an agnostic, if he will take the trouble to think clearly, must understand by it.

But, of course, no agnostic can accept this account, this definition, of it. He cannot admit that the human mind really possesses any power of knowledge, the existence of which, or at least the certainty of the possession of which, he denies. To do so would be plainly equivalent to an acknowledgment that his denial was unwarranted. He must maintain, therefore, that the only powers of knowledge which he denies to the mind are powers which it may fancy itself to possess but which it really does not possess. Hence he can only define agnosticism as the theory of knowledge which teaches us to doubt of, or disbelieve in, a power or powers of knowing which the mind is erroneously supposed to possess. In other words, he can only be satisfied with a definition of

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agnosticism which implies that it is the only true and reasonable theory of knowledge.

But, then, such a definition no opponent of agnosticism can accept. To do so would be to acknowledge himself an enemy of truth and reason. Thus, in this respect, the definition of agnosticism by its adherents is, if no worse, also no better than its definition by its non-adherents.

And in another respect it is even altogether inferior. It has no rational relation whatever to the etymology of the word of which it professes to be the definition. Etymologically agnosticism indicates negation of knowledge or of power of knowledge; but by the definition of agnostics it indicates nothing of the kind; nay, it indicates the contrary,—*negation of the illusion of knowledge and of fancied power of knowledge*. If they are right in their definition, quite a different term should manifestly have been invented to convey correctly to the mind what they wish it to mean. If agnosticism be what they describe it to be, then when they call themselves agnostics they act as unwisely as a theist would do were he to call himself an atheist in order to testify that he was not a pantheist or a polytheist. Indeed, for any one who admits the possibility of knowledge and holds that he denies to the mind no real power of knowledge to call himself an agnostic is, in word at least, expressly to contradict himself. The terms agnostic and agnosticism are terms which one can easily conceive many may feel quite justified in applying to other persons and to systems which they deem erro-

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neous, but which it is strange that many who are not specially conscious of ignorance or uncertainty should be found to accept as appropriate designations for themselves and for their convictions. And certainly those who call themselves agnostics, adherents of agnosticism, merely because they maintain that men very generally fancy the powers of human knowledge to be greater than they are, do themselves at least as much injustice by their appropriation of the terms as their opponents are likely to do by any other misapplication of them.

Two things seem to follow from the foregoing considerations: a right and a duty. The right is, to define agnosticism frankly and avowedly from one's own point of view. It is in vain for a non-agnostic to seek to find a definition of agnosticism which will satisfy an agnostic. Any definition of agnosticism which will satisfy an agnostic must of necessity fail to satisfy a non-agnostic. The agnostic cannot clearly or honestly express what he means by agnosticism except in terms which are, at least implicitly, *eulogistic*, nor the non-agnostic his conception of it otherwise than in terms which are, at least implicitly, *dyslogistic*. It has been said that words of the class to which agnosticism belongs "may be defined, in a more objective way, as particular kinds of tendency"; but incorrectly. There can be no real and profitable definition of any such term unless the particular tendency which is supposed to be differential of what the term denotes is specified; and there can be no such specification which is not implicitly eulo-



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gistic from those who regard it as a true, right, or useful tendency, or which is not implicitly dyslogistic from those who regard it as a false, wrong, or hurtful tendency. True and false, right and wrong, good and evil, cannot be defined save in terms explicitly eulogistic or dyslogistic; nor tendencies to them otherwise than in terms which are at least implicitly eulogistic or dyslogistic.

I claim, and intend to exercise, the right indicated. But, of course, I recognise that my definition must therefore be like my point of view, a relative and personal one. What seems to me to be agnosticism will not seem so, in my sense of the term, to those whom I regard as agnostics; and, on the other hand, my own views must appear to be agnostic to those whom I deem gnostics, inasmuch as they assign to the human mind powers of knowledge which I do not believe it to possess.

The duty which corresponds to the right just mentioned is that of not judging of any system which one deals with as agnostic merely by the definition which one gives of agnosticism. Definitions are made to be judged, and should not be appealed to as judges. This cannot reasonably be denied whenever their relative and subjective character is acknowledged; whenever they are avowedly the expressions of an individual's judgment, and deliberately opposed by him to those at which other individuals have arrived. In all such cases to judge by one's own definition is manifestly to judge in one's own favour.

Take again socialism as an illustration. If not a

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socialist, one must, as I have said, define socialism in a way which will imply that it necessarily involves injustice to individuals. The socialist will be apt to say that in doing so you start with the assumption that socialism is false and wrong, in order, by means of the assumption, to condemn it as such; and the charge will be justified if you really judge of the character of any so-called socialistic system by your definition of socialism. But that is what no reasonable and fair-minded man will do. Such a man will examine any system on its own merits, and decide by an unbiassed examination of it as it is in itself whether or not it does injustice to individuals; and all that he will do with his definition will be to determine whether, when compared with it, the system in question is to be called socialistic or not in the sense which he attaches to the term socialistic. In this there is nothing unfair or unreasonable: it is not judging of socialism by an unfavourable definition of it, but only deciding after an investigation, which may be and should be uninfluenced by the definition, whether the definition be applicable or not.

It is thus that I mean to deal with agnosticism. I require to examine its chief phases, and to criticise the principles on which it has proceeded and the conclusions which it has reached in the different forms it has assumed. In doing so I shall, of course, treat only of such views or doctrines as seem to me to deny to the mind powers of knowledge which it really possesses. But for holding any of those views or doc-

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trines to be thus erroneous I shall feel bound to adduce good and sufficient reasons; and my definition of agnosticism will never, I hope, be found among my reasons. It can merely justify my treating under the name of agnosticism those theories which are found by adequate and impartial investigation to have the distinctive characteristic which it assigns to agnosticism. It is not a premiss to be reasoned from, but a conclusion which the non-agnostic has to maintain and the agnostic to assail.

The term agnosticism then is, in my opinion, only accurately and appropriately employed when regarded as equivalent for what has been variously called philosophical, or theoretical, or metaphysical scepticism, or simply scepticism. It is the theory of the nature and limits of human intelligence which questions either the certainty of all knowledge and the veracity of every mental power, or the certainty of some particular kind of knowledge and the veracity of some particular mental power or powers. The limitation of the word to the sphere of religion is quite unjustifiable. There is no reason for calling a man an agnostic merely because he is an atheist or a positivist or a materialist. The name is appropriate, indeed, to one whose refusal to believe in the existence of God and of spiritual things is rested on the ground that the human mind is inherently and constitutionally incapable of knowing whether there are a God and spiritual things or not. But there is no kind of truth which may not be rejected on the ground that the human mind is inherently and con-

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stitutionally incapable of ascertaining whether or not there is such truth.

The weakness of the human mind is a plea which may be brought forward in any region of inquiry; and the plea is the same whatever be the region in which it is brought forward. Things, however, which have the same nature should have the same name. Hence wherever assent is withheld because of the alleged incompetency of the mind to ascertain the truth the name agnosticism is applicable. The rejection of any kind of truth on that ground is as much agnosticism as the rejection of any other kind. What is essential and invariable in agnosticism is the reason on which it supports itself, the attitude assumed towards truth and knowledge. What is non-essential and variable in it are the objects or propositions to which it refers.

Some have represented the scepticism which may appropriately be called agnosticism as disbelief of the attainability of truth. Others contend that it should be confined to doubt. For reasons hereafter to be indicated, I hold that it may be either doubt or disbelief. Not, however, either merely doubt or disbelief, but the doubt or disbelief which rests on the supposition that what are really powers of the human mind are untrustworthy; that what are actually normal perceptions, natural or even necessary laws and legitimate processes, are not to be depended on. Ordinary doubt and ordinary disbelief have their reasons in the objects or propositions examined by the mind, not in distrust of the mind itself. They imply

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nothing more than the conviction of the absence of evidence for, or the existence of evidence against, the particular position in dispute; but agnosticism challenges evidence, and refuses to be convinced by it, on the deeper and subtler ground that the mind is inherently incapable of deriving truth or certainty from what seemingly presents even the strongest claims to be regarded as evidence.

### III. AGNOSTICISM AND GnosticISM

Agnosticism may be directly opposed to gnosticism; it may be regarded as the contrary extreme. The word gnosticism has been long in use. It was first employed to denote a remarkable class or group of philosophico-religious systems which were somewhat widely diffused in the first centuries of the Christian era. The adherents of these systems supposed themselves to have a *gnosis* or knowledge of a deeper and more precious kind than other men. Regarding the divine nature, the invisible world, matter and spirit, evil and redemption, they confidently promulgated as the surest, highest, and most salutary knowledge speculations for which they adduced no evidence perceptible or intelligible to the understandings of other men. They assumed to themselves the name of *gnostics* (*γνωστικοί*), because they claimed to have an insight into truth such as no other philosophical or religious teachers had attained. But naturally the claim was not admitted by their opponents, and least of all by the Christian theologians

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who held that in Jesus were hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. For an Irenacus and Hippolytus the self-styled gnostic was accordingly a man who taught as knowledge "knowledge falsely so-called,"—what was not known and could not be known as knowledge. In their eyes the enlightened Christian was the true gnostic. At the same time, it was seen by the opponents of those who called themselves gnostics that the most convenient way of designating them was by the name which they had assumed; that nothing was conceded to them or could be gained by them thereby; that although by their appropriation of the name they claimed to be the exclusive possessors of the highest knowledge, the same name when applied to them by others would only mean that they were pretenders to an unattainable knowledge, wise only in their own eyes.

The mode of thought called gnostic, however, had appeared long before a name for it had been invented. Hence the gnostics just referred to had not been without precursors in the hierophants and philosophers of the ancient world. And they have had many successors; nor is their race yet extinct. Wherever there is mysticism, with its ecstasie conditions of spirit and claims to special illuminations and supernatural visions, there also must what is akin to the gnosticism which disturbed the peace of the early Christian Church be found, and mysticism is a fountain fed from perennial springs. Scotus Erigena and Jacob Boehme were as confident of knowing the unknowable as Basilides and Valentinus had been. In



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quite recent times Germany has produced and nourished a number of far-famed systems of theological and philosophical speculation thoroughly gnostic in character, inasmuch as professing to disclose and demonstrate things which are really beyond human ken. The follies of spiritualism, with which the present generation has been so familiar, have arisen in a large measure from eager desire to penetrate into the world beyond the grave, conjoined with the belief that, although this could not be effected by following the ordinary and recognised routes to knowledge, it might by proceeding along secret and private paths. It is only too certain that presumption and error of a gnostic kind are largely mingled with the thoughts of most men; and that they feel confident of knowing about God and the universe, about the mysteries of the present and the future life, not only far more than they actually know, but far more than with their present powers and means of knowledge they can know.

A gnostic may be described, then, as one who attributes to the human mind more power of attaining truth than it actually possesses; and an agnostic as one who will not allow that the human mind possesses as much power of acquiring knowledge as it really has. Thus viewed both the gnostic and agnostic err, but in opposite directions. The former has too much confidence, and the latter has too little trust. Presumption, rashness, irreverence, are the faults with which the gnostic is chargeable; timidity, indecision, and suspiciousness are those characteristic of the agnostic. The aim of every thinker should be to avoid

## BOTH ERRONEOUS

falling into what in either is erroneous and evil. Gnosticism and agnosticism are, as it were, two dangerous rocks—a Scylla and a Charybdis—which each man who embarks in quest of truth on the ocean of speculation will find ahead of him on his right and on his left; and if he would ever attain the end and object of his voyage he must steer between them, carefully shunning both. *In medio tutissimus*. This is the ideal, but no one is likely not to deviate to some extent from the track of perfect safety. Hardly any thinker is not either too bold or too timid, and the winds and waves are always setting powerfully towards the one danger or the other, so that it is rare that any one escapes without injury, and not wonderful that some are wholly wrecked.

The faults, it will be observed, both of the gnostic and agnostic, are closely connected with good qualities. If not virtues in excess, they are excesses of the same qualities from which virtues are formed. The over-confidence and credulity of the gnostic testify to an intellectual courage and a trust in truth which, when duly enlightened and regulated, are high merits. The hesitancy and suspiciousness of the agnostic are the exaggerations of an intellectual vigilance and caution which well deserves commendation. In endeavouring, therefore, to avoid the faults alike of gnosticism and agnosticism, we should be careful not to surrender or sacrifice the good qualities which they exaggerate or stimulate. On the contrary, we should anxiously seek to retain them, and in their proper relationship, so that they may

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serve alike as counteractive of and supplementary to one another. We must not, for example, cast away either the intellectual courage of the gnostic or the intellectual caution of the agnostic, but must strive to possess and exercise them in due proportion and true union, so that instead of being separate, exaggerated, and antagonistic, they may coalesce, harmonise, and co-operate.

From the very nature of truth want of the virtues which relate to it is a most terrible want. Truth is a matter of primary importance to us. It is the very sustenance of the spirit. It is the source and support of rational and moral life. It is to the mind what light is to the eye, what food is to the body. It is the condition of all real progress and prosperity alike for individuals and societies. There is nothing higher or better than truth; nay, there is nothing noble or good except what is true. There is nothing to be preferred to truth; nay, there is nothing which ought not to be sacrificed if found to be contrary to truth. God is not higher than truth, but is the truth, and he who doubts, disbelieves, or denies the truth, thereby doubts, disbelieves, and denies God. "The inquiry of truth," says Bacon, "which is the love-making or wooing of it—the knowledge of truth, which is the presence of it—and the belief of truth, which is the enjoying of it—is the sovereign good of human nature." Only where the love of truth is supreme can human character answer to any worthy idea of what it ought to be. If a man love the truth, he will be candid, sincere, impartial, generous, and

## FAITH AND DOUBT

aspire after purity and perfection; if he be content with falsehood, or any substitute for truth, he condemns himself to meanness and baseness of mind, to unfairness and dishonesty of disposition, to duplicity and deceitfulness of conduct.

Because truth is thus of essential and supreme significance to us, it is of vast importance that we should not doubt or despair either of its existence or of its attainability. Without faith that truth is, and without hope that it may be found by those who will seek it carefully and earnestly, it will not be so sought, and therefore will not be found. Wherever truth is, and is to be found, it is obviously a great misfortune not to be hopeful of finding it—not to be able to go forth to the search and conquest of it with good courage: a great misfortune, and the necessary source of sore loss and much unhappiness. To distrust and despair of truth is the sure way to miss the truth we might otherwise reach, and all the good dependent on that truth. A sceptical and pessimist spirit punishes itself by fulfilling its own doubts and fears.

On the other hand, caution is as necessary in the quest of truth as courage, seeing that, while truth is so essential and important, errors are even more numerous than truths, and credulity is far more common than scepticism. Man's first impressions of things are rarely just. Very few of his primitive beliefs commend themselves to the reason of his later years. Ordinary opinion is almost always too rash and positive. The firmest convictions of the multitude are often the most baseless prejudices. The du-

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ration of the ages of faith in history has greatly exceeded that of those of doubt. But have they been ages of light, of sound judgment, of honest research? The truths which science has established are mostly of recent date, and hardly one of them has been proved otherwise than through the disproof of many ancient errors. The progress of philosophy has been painfully slow, and has consisted rather in the apprehension of problems than in the attainment of solutions. It is impossible to look back along the history of religion, or even over the religious world of the present day, without having to acknowledge that a too critical temper has certainly not been a characteristic of humanity. Not agnosticism but gnosticism—not scepticism but dogmatism—is the favourite “ism.” The best excuse for the excess of unbelief which exists is the far greater excess of belief. Where the many are so foolishly ready to believe, the few who are unduly slow to believe should not be hastily or harshly condemned.

It would be erroneous and unwise, therefore, to take up a merely unsympathetic and hostile attitude towards agnosticism. That system is not devoid of truth but the exaggeration of truth, not wholly evil but evil by excess. Fully to recognise this is incumbent on every student of agnosticism. And, I must add, it is especially so on one who desires, in endeavouring to understand it, to keep prominently in view its relations to religion.

For religion is by no means unlikely to make men blind or unjust to what is true and good in agnosti-

## HISTORIC FAITH

cism. Not unnaturally the teachers and preachers of religion are specially prone to exaggerate the merit of belief and faith, and to depreciate and denounce unbelief and doubt. Religion springs from belief; its strength is the strength of faith. It spreads and flourishes through the enthusiasm begotten of belief or faith. The lower religions show the wonderful fertility of credulity. The greatest and highest religions all appeal at their origin to the faculty of faith, and with a success shown by the conversion of multitudes at once. As on trust in Christ all Christianity depends, so on trust in Mohammed all Mohammedanism depends, and on trust in Buddha all Buddhism. Faith has raised all these religions, and is their life, and the life of all that has been evolved from them. There is thus in the history of religions abundant testimony to the power of faith, and explanation enough of the eulogies which have been heaped upon faith by religious men.

But there is another side of things. If faith be strong and have done great works, doubt is not feeble and has wrought many achievements by no means contemptible. If faith have raised religions, doubt has often thrown them down, and in all of them has found much to eliminate and destroy. If theologians often speak as if all duty were summed up in religious faith, scientists and philosophers often speak as if the very root and spring of all progress and culture were scientific and philosophic doubt. The great revolutions of speculative thought at least have all originated in extensions of the operations of doubt. A



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believing enthusiastic type of character is the one most generally admired, and is supposed to be one of special excellence and strength. The doubting, questioning type of character is generally viewed with decided disfavour, and deemed culpable and weak. But such an estimate is plainly one-sided and superficial. To withhold belief may show as much virtue and strength as to give it. Socrates and Plato, Carneades and Aenesidemus, Descartes and Locke, Hume and Kant, and many others, in whose characters the quality of doubt was largely present, were unquestionably very superior men,—men who could brave the world's antagonism, and who singly did as much for the world's advancement as many thousands of burning enthusiasts combined have done.

A great deal might be said on behalf of doubt and doubters. But I am not going to constitute myself their apologist, any more than the apologist of belief and believers. In my view there is no merit either in mere belief or mere doubt: there is merit only in believing and doubting according to truth. Excess of belief, however, is as bad as excess of doubt; and there is excess wherever either belief or doubt outstrips reason and fails to coincide with truth. To doubt so long as there is reason for doubt is as much a duty as to believe where there is reason for belief. To believe where there is insufficient reason for belief is as much a fault as to doubt in opposition to sufficient evidence. Enthusiasm in the propagation of truth is admirable, but so is the enthusiasm in search of truth which will accept no substitute for truth, no

## CHRISTIAN FAITH AND DOUBT

unreasoned or unreasonable belief. The former enthusiasm without the latter is half-vice as well as half-virtue; and it is only by chance that it is not enthusiasm in the propagation of falsehood, which may be so far an object of admiration but must be equally an object of alarm.

Duty in relation to truth is not, as some seem to think,

“ The stern and prompt suppressing,  
As an obvious deadly sin,  
All the questing and the guessing  
Of the soul’s own soul within ; ”

but a sense of responsibility faithfully acted on alike in reference to doubt and belief. It requires us not to fear doubt any more than belief, and to shrink from no inquiry which even our deepest and boldest doubts suggest. The more fundamental and far-reaching are our doubts, the more necessary and incumbent it is that we should not rest until we find satisfaction in regard to them. Loyalty to reason and conscience obviously requires this.

And so does loyalty to Christianity. For Christianity presents itself with the claim to be “ the truth ” guaranteed by appropriate and adequate evidence. Only he who is “ in the truth ” can be “ in Christ,” and whoever is “ in the truth ” is, to the extent in which he is so, “ in Christ.” The faith which Christianity requires is one which does not evade doubt, but which deals with it and conquers it, and so proves, purifies, and strengthens itself. To evade doubt is

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neither the way to nor the sign of a vigorous faith. Doubt cannot be escaped by evasion or by refusal to inquire whether it is just or not. The man who seeks thus to escape doubt is already firmly in its grasp. He who is afraid to try his faith, to follow his doubt as far as reason will allow him to go, already distrusts his faith more than he who is prepared to test it; already doubts more than he who is willing to know fully what is the real worth of his doubt; and certainly shows less confidence in the truth of Christianity than a Christian should. A man who has no doubt of the firmness of the foundation on which his faith rests will not fear to have it examined.

“ He that would doubt,  
If he could,  
Alone cannot doubt,  
If he would.”

Agnosticism, it must be further observed, may not only help us to appreciate aright the function of doubt, but also aid us to realise aright the limitations of our knowledge. We are very apt to imagine it much more comprehensive, exact, and certain than it is. Hence the agnostic does good service by showing men that they are intellectually poorer and blinder than most of them suppose.

It has ever been his policy and practice to employ the term knowledge in an ideal sense, to argue that what currently passes as knowledge is not knowledge so understood, and to infer that what we deem knowledge is merely a persuasion of knowledge. The pro-

## MAN'S KNOWLEDGE IMPERFECT

cedure is sophistical. And yet it has been very effective, owing chiefly to its being so true that human knowledge falls far short of the ideal of knowledge, and is, in fact, in all respects very imperfect. Candidly to acknowledge, however, the truth involved in the argument will be the best preservative against what is fallacious in it. Knowledge does not cease to be knowledge or become faith by being imperfect. The agnostic has formed his notion of knowledge without reference to the facts, and must revise it until it includes and conforms to them. He has assumed the truth of a dogma as to the nature of knowledge from which to reason to the denial of the existence of knowledge wherever it has the imperfections which are inseparable from the limitations of human intelligence. Grant the imperfections, and it must be seen that what the agnostic argument really effects is merely the destruction of the dogma on which the agnostic proceeds,—the dogma that imperfect knowledge is not knowledge at all.

The ideal of knowledge is the absolute knowledge which belongs to God only: His perfect knowledge of Himself, of all creatures, and of all possibilities; a knowledge wholly original and wholly intuitive, indivisible and immutable; an all-inclusive knowledge within or beyond which there is no darkness at all. Far other is the knowledge of man: a knowledge small in amount and poor in quality; a knowledge relative, superficial, and fragmentary; a knowledge largely debased with the alloy of illusion and error; a knowledge which can only be slowly and painfully acquired,

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and which never leads to undisturbed rest or full satisfaction. The range of man's intellect is so narrow and the universe of existence is so vast and complex, that research always ends not with clear and complete solutions but with new and harder problems. The more man knows the more conscious he becomes of his ignorance. "The known," says Darwin, "is finite; the unknown is infinite; intellectually we stand on an islet in the midst of an illimitable ocean of inexplicability." "With every increase of diameter in the sphere of light," writes Chalmers, "there is an increase of surface in the circumambient darkness; with every step of advance on the path of knowledge, the onward obscurity retires a little, no doubt, but at the place where it begins is as deeply shrouded and presents a greater number of profound and unfathomable recesses than before."

Man knows nothing absolutely, comprehends nothing completely. He would require to be infinite so to know or comprehend "a flower in the crannied wall," an insect sporting in the sunbeam, or, in a word, even the very least of finite things. How foolish, then, must it be for him to fancy that he can so know or comprehend the Self-existent and Almighty one, the first and the last, the beginning and the end of all that is! God is unknowable in the absoluteness of His being, incomprehensible in the infinity of His perfections. And most necessary is it that this should be habitually borne in mind by those who maintain that they truly know that God is and in some respects surely apprehend what He is; for

## LESSON IN AGNOSTICISM

through forgetfulness of it much presumptuous speculation as to the Divine Nature has been indulged in, much foolish gnosticism propounded, even in the present day; and from the same cause much of our theology is still painfully anthropomorphic, representing God as so human in passions and feelings, so like to ourselves, that His necessary transcendence to us, and to all that is finite, is ignored. Theological dogmatism and the religious conceptions of the ordinary man are to a large extent deplorably lacking in humility and reverence. Hence agnosticism, even in exaggerating our ignorance of the Divine, carries within it a lesson for us and has a spiritual purpose to serve in the world. Nowhere is it so true as in theology that "when a man has got to the end, he is just beginning; and when he ceases, he is still full of questions."



## CHAPTER II

### ERRONEOUS VIEWS OF AGNOSTICISM

IN the previous chapter I have endeavoured to determine what signification ought to be assigned to the term agnosticism, and to indicate what agnosticism itself is. If, however, the conclusions at which I arrived were correct, many representations of agnosticism in circulation must be erroneous. It seems desirable briefly to show wherein the more plausible or widely accepted of those representations are at fault. In exposing false views of the nature of agnosticism we necessarily do something to vindicate and confirm, and to render more clear and definite, the true view.

#### I. NOT EQUIVALENT TO TRUTH—SEARCH OR HONESTY IN INVESTIGATION. J. OWEN AND HUXLEY.

1. Agnosticism may be understood, and has been understood, to mean simply free thought, thorough and honest inquiry. Scepticism has been thus understood; and scepticism in its philosophical acceptation is just another and older name for what has of late come to be called agnosticism. It is in this wide and vague sense of "truth-search" that the late Rev. John Owen employs the term "scepticism" in his very learned and valuable work entitled *Evenings*

## JOHN OWEN ON SCEPTICISM

*with the Sceptics* (4 vols.). He divides thinking mankind into two great classes, dogmatists and sceptics, denoting respectively those who feel certain that they have found truth and those who seek truth. All whom he regards as inquirers, cautious and close examiners, persevering searchers after truth, he designates sceptics. He thus identifies scepticism in its philosophical signification with scepticism in its etymological sense: the scepticism which is "confined to no period, race, religious or secular belief," and which is equivalent to "free thought," "inquiring doubt," "the exercise of the questioning and suspensive faculty," "the instinct that spontaneously distrusts both finality and infallibility as necessary attributes of truth," "the natural protest of the human mind against the tyranny of human dogma—against the combined despotism and narrowness of every scheme of human omniscience and self-arrogated authority," "the Protestantism of theology and philosophy," "the attitude to every system of belief, not of indiscriminate affirmation or denial, but of inquiry, careful, cautious, and continuous—the determination, according to the Apostolic precept, to prove all things, and to hold fast only that which is good."

If scepticism be entitled to be thus described so is agnosticism. And certainly no professed sceptic or agnostic is likely to complain of such an account of his own character. So much generosity, indeed, is displayed towards him that it is difficult to see what room there is left for justice to any one else. The Greek sceptics in designating themselves *οἱ σκεπτικοί*

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and their opponents *οἱ δογματικοί*, no doubt wished to suggest that they alone sought truth aright, and that all other philosophers only taught doctrines to which they had assented without sufficient inquiry. But they had clearly no right to suggest anything of the sort—no right to use the terms mentioned as “question-begging appellatives.” The sceptic of the present day who calls himself an agnostic no doubt desires it to be implied that all thinkers who differ from him as to the limits of human knowledge are gnostics, believing that they know what they do not and cannot know; but he cannot reasonably expect that non-agnostics will either take him at his own estimate or accept his estimate of themselves.

The view which Mr. Owen gives of scepticism is obviously defective. The history of scepticism understood so as to be in accordance with it would be the whole history of reason when true to itself, the entire history of human enlightenment—a history wider than, but inclusive of the history of all science and of all philosophy. It would be a history in which the history of the scepticism of the philosophical schools would be entitled only to a comparatively small space; one for which even the wide bounds assigned to it by Mr. Owen would be absurdly narrow.

Philosophical scepticism is a species of thought quite distinct from, although, of course, not unrelated to, ordinary doubt and inquiry, suspense of judgment, and quest of truth in general. It can have no existence except where speculation and philosophy exist.

## DOGMATISM AND SCEPTICISM

To conceive of it as instinct or spontaneity, or the simple natural exercise of any faculty, is wholly to misunderstand its nature. It is an essentially exceptional and limited, reflective and theoretical, procedure or state of mind.

The division of philosophers on which the view of philosophical scepticism in question rests—the division into dogmatists and sceptics—is plainly not a logical division at all. There is no philosophy where there is no search for truth. Whoever does not seek truth and feel that what he knows is but a little in comparison with what he does not know, has no claim to be considered a philosopher. It does not follow that because a man may believe certain great truths to be well established, that he has renounced research and must be excluded from the class of truth-seekers. The immense majority of thinkers must in justice be regarded as both dogmatic and sceptic, in the merely general meanings of the terms. One may tend more to belief and another more to doubt; one may be of a more receptive and constructive, and another of a more critical and distrustful cast of intellect; but the difference is only of degree, and the extreme types of either habits of mind are comparatively few.

It is not at all the mere seeking of truth which characterises the philosophical sceptic or agnostic; it is the want of belief that seeking can be successful. This want of belief may, of course, often save him from ceasing from search under the notion that he has found truth when he really has not; but that it is

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any real stimulus to seek for truth may very reasonably be questioned. Three elements must combine in order to constitute the full motive to search for truth—namely, a consciousness of imperfectly apprehending truth, a desire to apprehend it springing from the love of it, and a conviction that if we exert ourselves we may attain to a more perfect apprehension of it. In the agnostic or philosophical sceptic there is the first of these elements, and there may be also, although not perhaps very consistently, the second, but the third is absent; and hence he has not more but less motive to seek for truth zealously than many other men.

2. Professor Huxley has given an account of agnosticism almost identical with Mr. Owen's of scepticism. The following excerpt from his writings may suffice as proof: "Agnosticism, in fact, is not a creed, but a method, the essence of which lies in the rigorous application of a single principle. That principle is of great antiquity; it is as old as Socrates; as old as the writer who said, 'Try all things, hold fast by that which is good'; it is the foundation of the Reformation, which simply illustrated the axiom that every man should be able to give a reason for the faith that is in him; it is the great principle of Descartes; it is the fundamental axiom of modern science. Positively the principle may be expressed: In matters of the intellect, follow your reason as far as it will take you, without regard to any other consideration. And negatively: In matters of the intellect, do not pretend that conclusions are certain

## HUXLEY'S DESCRIPTION OF AGNOSTICISM

which are not demonstrated or demonstrable. That I take to be the agnostic faith, which if a man keep whole and undefiled, he shall not be ashamed to look the universe in the face, whatever the future may have in store for him.”<sup>1</sup>

What we have here described to us as “the agnostic faith” is simply honesty in investigation. The excellence of that quality of mind is, of course, unquestionable; and the obligatoriness of exercising it ought to be self-evident whatever be the subject of investigation. It may be more difficult to practise it—more difficult to apply what Professor Huxley calls its “principle”—in philosophy and theology than in physical science, but it is none the less binding. Is it reasonable, however, to represent agnosticism as synonymous with intellectual honesty? Is it equitable to attribute to it, or to any other *ism*, that virtue as exclusively its own, its differential quality? The mere fact that inquirers of all kinds lay claim to intellectual honesty seems to me sufficient to warrant our answering these questions in the negative.

That the account which he gives of agnosticism is far too general and vague Huxley himself immediately, although unconsciously, proceeds to help us to realise. He writes: “The results of the working out of the agnostic principle will vary according to individual knowledge and capacity, and according to the general condition of science. That which is unproven to-day may be proven by the help of new discoveries to-morrow. The only negative fixed points

<sup>1</sup> *Collected Essays*, vol. v. pp. 245, 246.



## ERRONEOUS VIEWS OF AGNOSTICISM

will be those negations which flow from the demonstrable limitation of our faculties. And the only obligation accepted is to have the mind always open to conviction. Agnostics who never fail in carrying out these principles are, I am afraid, as rare as other people of whom the same consistency can be truthfully predicated. But if you were to meet with such a phoenix and to tell him that you had discovered that two and two make five, he would patiently ask you to state your reasons for that conviction, and express his readiness to agree with you if he found them satisfactory. The apostolic injunction to 'suffer fools gladly' should be the rule of life of a true agnostic. I am deeply conscious how far I myself fall short of this ideal, but it is my personal conception of what agnostics ought to be."<sup>1</sup>

Here too the working out of the agnostic principle means merely the conscientious exercise of intelligence in the pursuit of truth. But as that may lead to gnosticism no less than to agnosticism, agnostic is not a more appropriate term for it than gnostic. The agnostic, it may be further remarked, is just as likely as the gnostic to fancy that he has discovered two and two to make five. It may even be thought that the agnostic is specially liable to such folly. A much more thorough agnostic than Professor Huxley, the renowned Carneades, refused to admit that two quantities equal to another quantity must be equal to each other. The agnosticism of Lamennais led him to deny the certainty of mathematical axioms. John

<sup>1</sup> *Collected Essays*, vol. v. pp. 246, 247.

## HUXLEY'S OWN CREED

S. Mill was in a very agnostic mood when he affirmed the possibility of a world in which propositions like two and two make five may hold good.

The working out of the so-called agnostic principle may thus, according to the view under consideration, lead to all sorts of conclusions, gnostic included, and that even in the hands of an agnostic. The immediate occasion of Mr. Huxley's declaration that "agnostics have no creed, and, by the nature of the case, cannot have any," was that Mr. Laing, a man of much and varied ability and of pronounced agnostic opinions, had drawn up, at the request of Mr. Gladstone, a summary in eight articles of what he deemed the agnostic creed. Of that summary Mr. Huxley has said, "When I consider his" (Mr. Laing's) "creed and compare it with the Athanasian, I think I have on the whole a clearer conception of the latter."<sup>1</sup> But if so, may not the Athanasian creed itself, however dogmatic and gnostic its articles may be held to be, have been the working out of what is termed the agnostic principle?

Besides, Professor Huxley's own agnosticism was certainly not exclusive of creed or dogma. He invented the term agnostic to distinguish himself from the adherents of a variety of *isms*, philosophical and theological, expressly because, in his words, "they were quite sure that they had a certain 'gnosis'—had, more or less successfully, solved the problem of existence; while I was quite sure I had not, and had a pretty strong conviction that the problem was insol-

<sup>1</sup> *Collected Essays*, vol. v. p. 247.

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able." Now, any man *quite sure* of all that must, whatever he may imagine to the contrary, not only have a creed, but one of considerable extent. Its negative dogmas, I venture to think, would of themselves require more than eight articles for their separate and explicit formulation. But Professor Huxley's creed was far from exclusively negative. His agnosticism was confined to beliefs not drawn from and confirmed by sense-perceptions, but was not hostile to such as were. It consequently coexisted with a creed comprehensive of many positive doctrines.

To say of agnosticism that it is not a creed but a method is, in fact, not one whit truer than it would be to say so of gnosticism. Gnosticism has had no general creed, but it has produced a crowd of creeds. So has it been with agnosticism. It has no common or general creed; but it has as many creeds as it has forms, and the number of its forms relatively to the number of its adherents is very great. Creed cannot be got rid of by any intelligent being. Certainly it has not been got rid of by any one who is "quite sure" as to what either can or cannot be known.

### II. NOT EQUIVALENT TO KNOW-NOTHINGISM. RELATION OF AGNOSTICISM TO THE THEORY OF NESCIENCE

1. The agnostic is sometimes described as *one who does not know*, and agnosticism as *know-nothingism*, "a know-nothing creed." This account of the agnostic and agnosticism is not unfrequently to be met

## AGNOSTICISM AND NESCIENCE

with in a certain kind of religious literature. It is nevertheless a misrepresentation and caricature.

Not to know is merely to be ignorant, and to know nothing is merely to be completely ignorant. But merely to be ignorant is not to be an agnostic; ignorance, even if it were complete, would not be agnosticism. The new-born child is ignorant, but it is not an agnostic. The agnostic is not only one who does not know, but one who has convinced himself that the human mind lacks the powers necessary to enable it to know. Agnosticism is a learned ignorance based on self-knowledge and philosophical reflection.

Besides, there are very few agnostics who profess to know nothing, and to be unable to know anything, unless it be in a special sense of the word "know," which so alters the meaning of the statement as to make it harmless or even true. There is a sense in which no man does know anything. He knows only as a man may know; he does not know as God knows; he does not know completely, or with a full and infallible knowledge, anything in its whole nature and entire relationships. "If any man think," says St. Paul, "that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know" (1 Cor. viii. 2). There we have St. Paul declaring that any true knowledge we can have—the knowledge that we all ought to have—is a consciousness of knowing nothing. But he did not thereby proclaim himself an agnostic, anxious to convert all men to agnosticism. He only expressed his sense of the imperfection of human knowledge, and his desire that all men humbly so felt its

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imperfection as not to be unduly proud of it, which they are very apt to be, and indeed generally the more apt the more imperfect it is. Accordingly his remarkable and profound declaration was immediately preceded by the words—"We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth."

Agnosticism and the profession of complete inability to know are, then, not to be identified. But neither are they to be entirely separated. The completest agnosticism must be that which allows to the mind least capacity for knowledge. An agnosticism which succeeded in showing that man is wholly destitute of power to know would be perfect as agnosticism. But such perfection agnosticism has never attained, nor can reasonably hope ever to attain. A demonstrated ignorance is at least not ignorance so far as the demonstration is concerned. As all proving involves knowing, the proving that there is no knowing is a sort of proving which is inherently self-contradictory. The necessity of self-justification is for agnosticism a necessity of self-limitation.

2. It is desirable to have a clear view of the relation of agnosticism (scepticism) to *the doctrine of nescience*. The relation is not unfrequently one of identity with what is called the doctrine of nescience, the designation often meaning merely the agnostic or sceptical doctrine of nescience,—such a doctrine as undertakes to show that what all except agnostics (sceptics) suppose to be knowledge (science) is really ignorance (nescience),—unsupported and unverified

## DOCTRINES OF NESCIENCE

belief, a blind faith produced by non-rational causes. The doctrine of nescience of Aenesidemus and Sextus Empiricus, of Hirnhaim and Huet, of Hume and Maimon, for example, is often called a doctrine of universal nescience, and it is so, but only in the sense indicated,—one in which it is plainly identical with universal scepticism, absolute agnosticism. So the doctrine of nescience of Auguste Comte and Thomas Huxley, which while professing to prove man's necessary ignorance of all that lies beyond the sphere of sense-perception admits a possible knowledge of all that lies within it, is at once a doctrine of partial nescience and a form of partial agnosticism or scepticism, for the simple reason that it is an agnostic or sceptical doctrine of nescience.

But a doctrine of nescience has no exclusive or special connection with agnosticism or scepticism. The most extreme gnosticism, the most uncompromising dogmatism, implies a doctrine of nescience no less than does the most thorough agnosticism, the most resolute scepticism. A doctrine of nescience may, in a word, be either gnostic or agnostic, or neither gnostic nor agnostic. And, it should be observed, that in endeavouring to reach a true doctrine of nescience we should prosecute our investigations unbiassed by a desire that it should be either the one or the other, or the one more than the other. In itself a doctrine of nescience is simply a reasoned answer to the question, What are the limits beyond which, and the conditions failing to comply with which, the mind of man necessarily wanders in ignorance and error? In



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other words, it is an essential part or necessary complement of the theory of knowledge, or, as it is commonly called, epistemology. Thus understood, agnoscology or agnoiology is a sufficiently appropriate designation for a doctrine of nescience, but agnosticism is a very misleading one.

Agnosticism is only a special theory of nescience, the sceptical theory. If, in this special sense, it is a doctrine of universal nescience, it is complete agnosticism, but if a doctrine of nescience only within a particular sphere of belief or inquiry, it is partial agnosticism. It would be decidedly advantageous, however, if by the doctrine of nescience were always meant not agnosticism but agnoiology;—not a deliberate endeavour to prove knowledge in whole or in part unattainable, but an impartial inquiry as to when and where it ceases to be attainable.

### III. NOT NECESSARILY ATHEISM, ALTHOUGH ATHEISM IS OFTEN AGNOSTICISM. DR. BITHELL'S POSITION

Agnosticism is not to be identified with a knowing nothing position in religion or as to the object of religious faith and worship. This is often done in popular religious discourse and literature, but it is an error in defence of which little can be relevantly said.

Agnosticism is properly a theory about knowledge, not about religion. It may be about religion, for it may doubt or deny that we can know spiritual truth; it may even be exclusively about religion, for it may doubt or deny the attainability of no other kind of

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truth than spiritual truth. Recent agnosticism has been in a large measure agnosticism only as to the truth implied in religion and indispensable to its vindication. But religion may be held to be the one thing which may be best known, or even the only thing which can be truly known; all else, it may be contended, is illusion and error. In India philosophic thought has been agnostic in hardly any other sense than this. The Greek sceptics were not more sceptical as to religious than as to empirical or ethical truth: their agnosticism was universal, or nearly so,—not specially anti-religious. It has often been attempted to show that nature and reason are untrustworthy, with a view to induce men to accept revelation with unquestioning faith. This procedure is none the less agnostic because undertaken in support of religious authority.

It follows, even from what has just been said, that agnosticism is not atheism. Agnosticism is sometimes spoken of as only another name for atheism, or as a kind of atheism. This should never be done. Agnosticism may be combined with atheism as it may with Christianity, but it is no more atheism, or a kind of atheism, than it is Christianity, or a kind of Christianity.

A theist and a Christian may be an agnostic; an atheist may not be an agnostic. A man who believes that God can be known, but not that an external world can be known, is as much an agnostic as a man who believes that an external world can be known, but not that God can be known. An atheist may deny

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that there is a God, and in this case his atheism is dogmatic, not agnostic; or he may refuse to acknowledge that there is a God simply on the ground that he perceives no evidence for His existence, and finds the arguments which have been advanced in proof of it invalid: and in this case his atheism is critical, not agnostic. It consequently always shows want of clearness of mind, and sometimes, it is to be feared, it shows uncharitableness of heart, to treat agnosticism as equivalent to atheism.

The atheist may however be, and not unfrequently is, an agnostic. There is an agnostic atheism or atheistic agnosticism, and the combination of atheism with agnosticism which may be so named is not an uncommon one. While, therefore, it is unwarrantable and unjust to identify agnosticism and atheism, the accuracy of a passage like the following, taken from an exceptionally interesting agnostic treatise, cannot be admitted: "An agnostic is not an atheist. Positive, dogmatic atheism is as repugnant to the sentiments of the true agnostic as any of the false certitudes embodied in the professions of religious sects. He usually knows quite as much of God, immortality, the soul, as most other men; but he does not pretend to know what he does not and cannot know, nor does he dignify with the name of *knowledge* what is perhaps at best a mere traditional *belief*, incapable of proof, and unverified by experience. The atheist does the contrary of this. The man who says, 'There is no God,' makes a universal declaration which assumes an amount of knowledge, and

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knowledge of such a kind as never was possessed by any human mortal.”<sup>1</sup>

Now such an account of the atheist is just as much a misrepresentation as is that of the agnostic to which objection is taken. The atheist is not necessarily a man who says “There is no God.” What is called positive or dogmatic atheism, so far from being the only kind of atheism, is the rarest of all kinds. It has often been questioned whether there is any such thing. But every man is an atheist who does not believe that there is a God, although his want of belief may not be rested on any allegation of positive knowledge that there is no God, but simply on one of want of knowledge that there is a God. If a man have failed to find any good reason for believing that there is a God, it is perfectly natural and rational that he should not believe that there is a God; and if so, he is an atheist, although he assume no superhuman knowledge, but merely the ordinary human power of judging of evidence. If he go farther, and, after an investigation into the nature and reach of human knowledge, ending in the conclusion that the existence of God is incapable of proof, cease to believe in it on the ground that he cannot know it to be true, he is an agnostic and also an atheist, an agnostic-atheist—an atheist because an agnostic. There are unquestionably many such atheists. Agnosticism is among the commonest of apologies for atheism. While, then, it is erroneous to identify agnosticism

<sup>1</sup> *The Creed of a Modern Agnostic.* By Richard Bithell, B.Sc., Ph.D., pp. 12, 13. London, 1883.

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and atheism, it is equally erroneous so to separate them as if the one were exclusive of the other: that they are frequently combined is an unquestionable fact.

The author of the passage to which I am referring seems to suppose that a man may believe that there is a God, and at the same time believe that he has no knowledge that there is a God, and that his belief that there is a God is "perhaps at best a mere traditional belief, incapable of proof, and unverified by experience." If there be any such man, I grant that in virtue of his belief that there is a God he is entitled to be called a theist and wronged if he be called an atheist. But I confess I seriously doubt his existence. Belief which is fully conscious of being mere belief, without any true knowledge of its object or any good reason for itself, and without any capability of proof or verification, is, it appears to me, self-contradictory belief, and a psychologically impossible state of mind. Why I think so will be indicated at a later stage of this inquiry.

### IV. NOT TO BE IDENTIFIED WITH POSITIVISM.

PROFESSOR FRASER

A very common misconception as to agnosticism is that it is identical with positivism, phenomenalism, empiricism—with that system according to which knowledge is limited to what is sensibly apprehended or immediately felt, to appearances, to perceptions or modes of consciousness. This view has commended itself to many philosophical thinkers. Thus, to give

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only one instance, Professor Fraser has written as follows: "One of the chief intellectual formations, in the interval since Hume, has been what is now called positive or agnostic philosophy. In this pan-phenomenalism, knowledge is limited to physically produced beliefs in coexistences and successions—extended by 'inferences from particulars to particulars'—all at last regarded as an evolution, through habit and association, individual and inherited. With regard to everything beyond, this sort of philosophy is professedly antagonistic. Agnosticism must be distinguished from the universal scepticism that does not admit either of proof or disproof. The latter dissolves the cement of all belief, even beliefs in relations of coexistence or succession among phenomena. The former only alleges that outside the coexisting and successive phenomena of sense there is nothing to be cemented—that all assertions or denials about supposed realities beyond the range of natural science are illusions."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Berkeley* (in Blackwoods' Philosophical Classics), p. 226. The quotation is from the first edition. In "a new edition, amended," the corresponding passage runs thus: "One of the chief intellectual formations, in the interval since Hume, has been what is sometimes called Naturalism. In Naturalism, knowledge is supposed to be limited to physically produced beliefs—extended by 'inference from particulars to particulars'—all regarded as issue of blind evolution, through habit and association, individual or inherited. With regard to everything beyond, this philosophy is professedly agnostic," &c. To that view my criticism is not meant to apply, and I am happy to find myself in agreement with the esteemed and honoured author. I have not deemed it necessary, however, to alter what was not only written but in print before his second edition appeared, as the whole section is as relevant now as then against the very prevalent confusion of agnosticism with positivism.



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Now, positivism may, perhaps, be correctly held to imply agnosticism, but it should not be identified with it. In all that it affirms positivism is the contrary of agnosticism, the limitation and exclusion of agnosticism. It is the concession that all phenomena are knowable, and so far is non-agnostic. But there have been forms of philosophy directly opposed to positivism—idealistic, ontological, speculative forms of philosophy—which made no such concession to sense and ordinary experience, but held, on the contrary, that these were the special haunts of uncertainty and falsehood, and that truth was only to be found in the regions of pure thought and absolute being. So far as regards sense and phenomena, it is plainly such forms of philosophy which are agnostic, and the varieties of positivism which are non-agnostic.

When positivism denies that we can know anything beyond what it calls experience and phenomena, the denial seems clearly to require for its vindication a theory of knowledge, and one which, if the denial be legitimate, must be of an agnostic kind. The positivist may or may not, however, have such a theory; and although he may be inconsistent without it, he may be not more so than with it. Irrationality is before him either way.

It is obviously unsatisfactory to define the limits of knowledge without any investigation of the nature of knowledge. The positivism which merely “alleges” that the mind can know nothing except the coexisting and successive phenomena of sense is not entitled to

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be called agnosticism, because it is not philosophy. It has an unreasoned belief and makes an arbitrary assertion regarding knowledge, but it has no critical or philosophical theory regarding knowledge; and where there is no such theory to speak of agnosticism is out of place.

On the other hand, how, consistently with the general theory of positivism, can a theory of knowledge be attained which will justify agnosticism? How from actual experience alone can the limits of possible experience be determined? It would seem as if, in order to attempt, with any reasonable hopes of success, to ascertain the range of man's capability of knowledge, we must inquire into the nature of his powers of knowledge, and not merely make a survey of what, in our opinion, he actually knows. And yet it is very difficult to see how positivism can afford to acknowledge this; for it means that so far from experience exclusively limiting thought, thought still more limits experience—that knowledge itself is not to be studied merely in the phenomena of knowledge—that even to attempt to cast out the Beelzebub of metaphysics we must begin by invoking his aid.

In a word, while the negations of the positivist as to the spiritual and the supernatural must appear unwarranted assertions until based on some agnostic theory of the nature and conditions of cognition, in order to establish such a theory the positivist must sacrifice his positivism. Hence many positivists evade the task of inquiring into the limits of human knowledge, and simply assert that nothing is known

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beyond phenomena, on the ground that experience and history testify that all attempts to know more than phenomena have hitherto been failures, and that it may, consequently, be held that all similar attempts will equally be failures. That this is not self-consistent or logical may readily be granted; but positivism cannot be self-consistent and logical, either when superficial and dogmatic, or when more profound through alliance with agnosticism.

The preceding considerations may suffice to show that positivism ought not to be identified with agnosticism, although it has an agnostic aspect or involves agnosticism. It has to be added, that there is no need for this new name of agnosticism merely to designate the system called positivism, phenomenalism, empiricism, sensationism. These other and older terms are amply sufficient. None of them may be free from defects, but the most faulty of them is a more appropriate appellation than agnosticism of the doctrine to which they are applied.

### V. NOT TO BE IDENTIFIED WITH DENIAL OF THE COGNOSCIBILITY, ACCOMPANIED WITH AFFIRMATION OF THE REALITY, OF THE ABSOLUTE. PROFESSOR CALDERWOOD

Another mode of employing the word agnosticism is the restriction of it to a denial of the cognoscibility of the absolute, when the denial is associated with an admission that the absolute, although unknown and unknowable, certainly exists, and is a legitimate and

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even necessary object of belief. Agnosticism thus understood is deemed of modern growth, and traced to Kant's theory of knowledge. It is, indeed, virtually identified with the doctrine of Hamilton, Mansel, and Spencer as to the unconditioned.<sup>1</sup>

Is it desirable to take this limited view of it? I think not. If it may be thus restricted, why not still further? Why not define it, for example, as the doctrine which teaches that the absolute cannot be known, and is to be believed in only as the cause everywhere present, and manifesting itself in all phenomena? You will thereby be freed from the necessity of treating Christian theists, like Hamilton and Mansel, as agnostics, and will mean by agnosticism a definite individual theory—that of Spencer as to the unknowable.

It will be said that such definiteness and restriction would be the reverse of merits; that by exclusively applying an essentially general name to the particular theory of knowledge held by Mr. Spencer, the intimate affinity of his theory with that of Hamilton and Mansel would be ignored or concealed; that it is sufficient to say "the agnosticism of Spencer," whenever this theory is meant, but very inexpedient on any occasion to represent Mr. Spencer and his followers as the only agnostics.

And all that is true, and quite conclusive against identifying agnosticism with Spencerian agnosticism. It applies also, however, against restricting the name

<sup>1</sup> See the article *Agnosticism* by Professor Calderwood in *Religious Encyclopædia*, edited by Dr. Schaff.

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agnosticism even to the whole movement of speculation as to the incognoscibility yet credibility of the absolute with which the names of Hamilton, Mansel, and Spencer are familiarly associated. The entire doctrine which these authors hold in common is but a stage or form of a far older and broader doctrine, a portion of a whole from which it cannot without violence and violation of nature be severed. In the negative and only properly agnostic element of it there is nothing original. The cognoscibility of the absolute has been denied from the very commencement of the history of philosophical scepticism; by Protagoras and Pyrrho not less than by Hamilton or Spencer, although in a different manner and for different reasons. On the mere ground of that denial, therefore, it is unreasonable to confine the name of agnosticism to a class of thinkers who have lived after Kant.

Is it said that these thinkers, while denying the possibility of knowing the absolute, have yet affirmed the necessity of believing in its existence either as personality or cause, as God or force? But this affirmation also is not original or distinctive. It had been maintained by theologians ages before Kant and Hamilton associated their names with it. It was even more generally approved among the philosophical sceptics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than it has been among those of the nineteenth.

Besides, it does not seem to be an appropriate reason for calling a man an agnostic that he holds himself bound to believe more than he can know. For ob-

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viously it implies that if a man hold *that the absolute cannot be known and ought not to be believed in* he is not an agnostic, but if he hold that *the absolute cannot be known yet ought to be believed in* he is an agnostic; in other words, it makes the distinctive characteristic of agnosticism to lie not in its restriction of the sphere of knowledge, but in its extension of the sphere of belief. But to do so is to sever the connection between the term agnosticism and its etymology, and to that extent an abuse of language. All who hold the same theory of knowledge should obviously, when viewed in respect to it, be called by the same name; and all who claim extraordinary rights or powers of belief should, when that claim is in question, be designated by some name indicative of its nature. Agnosticism is an appropriate name for a certain theory of knowledge, but one altogether inappropriate for any theory of belief.

Hamilton, Mansel, Spencer, and other supporters of that theory of nescience which found in Professor Calderwood one of its most acute and careful critics, may justly be called agnostics on account of their denial of the cognoscibility of the Absolute or God, just as those who deny the cognoscibility of the Relative, whether World or Self, may be fairly so designated. But, it seems to me, one cannot consistently limit the name of agnostic to those who deny the cognoscibility of the Absolute, and still less to those who, while denying its cognoscibility, affirm their faith in its reality. A philosophically maintained belief in the incognoscibility of the Absolute is not coextensive



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with the theory or doctrine of nescience, but only with a theory or doctrine of a certain kind of nescience. The term *agnostotheism* might, perhaps, be an appropriate term for the theory which denies the cognoscibility of God, and *agnostotheists* for its upholders. My Greek does not suggest to me a suitable designation for the theory which at once denies knowledge of and affirms faith in God. Possibly even the Greek language may not be found readily to supply a convenient term for such a tenet as that what is entirely unknowable ought nevertheless to be believed.

### VI. ROBERTY'S VIEWS ON THE NATURE OF AG- NOSTICISM STATED AND CRITICISED

An able French publicist—M. E. de Roberty—has during recent years treated of agnosticism in a very ingenious and independent manner in several works the titles of which are given below.<sup>1</sup> His peculiar view of its character is naturally and logically dependent on the thoroughness of his empiricism.

For M. de Roberty, as for Professor Calderwood, agnosticism is “the doctrine of the unknowable”; but he holds that the doctrine of the unknowable is inclusive of “the whole of religion and the whole of metaphysics,” and not merely of such phases of belief regarding the unknowable as the so-called critical ag-

<sup>1</sup> *L'Ancienne et la Nouvelle Philosophie*, 1887. *L'Inconnaissable, Sa Metaphysique, Sa Psychologie*, 1889. *La Philosophie du Siècle-Criticisme-Positivisme-Evolutionisme*, 1891. *Agnosticisme. Essai sur quelques théories pessimistes de la connaissance*, 1892. *La Recherche de l'unité*, 1893. *Auguste Comte et Herbert Spencer*, 1894.

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nosticism of Kant, positivist agnosticism of Comte, conditional agnosticism of Hamilton and Mansel, or evolutionist agnosticism of Spencer.

The latter, according to M. de Roberty, far from really being what their adherents, the advanced spirits of our epoch, suppose them to be—the last and highest results of a long legitimate evolution, or recent and valuable acquisitions of philosophy, or direct negations of all religion and metaphysics—are only nineteenth century phases of a process of illusion which goes back to, and is essentially one with, primitive fetichism. Agnosticism, he holds, is a very complex illusion, which has its roots in a great number of similar illusions, some of which are of a psychological and others of a social nature; and when this complex phenomenon is analysed there is found to be a perfect identity between the central conception of the most primitive religions, or of the most outgrown metaphysical systems, and the notion of the unknowable. Religious faiths, metaphysical doctrines, and agnostic beliefs are, in his view, perfectly homologous groups of sociological phenomena, fulfilling essentially the same functions and following the same laws of metamorphosis. The unknowable plurality of inaccessible accepted by Comte is akin to polytheism; the Unknowable in the singular revered by Mr. Spencer is akin to theological monism; the faith of Hamilton in an unknowable Unconditioned is a revival of the belief in the supernatural characteristic of the primitive state of humanity—a case of intellectual atavism. Supernatural and unknowable are only dif-

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ferent names for the same thing; and in all religions there is the same supernaturalism, in all philosophies the same agnosticism. Religion is an unconscious agnosticism; metaphysics a semi-unconscious agnosticism, varying according to the epoch of time and the type of system—materialistic, idealistic, or sensualistic—to which it belongs; and the avowed agnosticism of to-day is a stage of the same process. So far from being the formal negation of theology and its eldest daughter metaphysics, it is simply their modern form, their direct descendant and legitimate heir-ess.

M. de Roberty foresees that the view which he gives of agnosticism will be objected to on the ground, that whereas what he calls ancient agnosticism (religion and metaphysics) pursued the search of the unknowable with faith and hope, modern agnosticism deliberately renounces such search and expressly acknowledges that the absolute cannot be known,—that all quest of first and final causes must fail. He deals, however, with the objection, and concludes that it is worthless. Those who pursue objects which turn out to be absurdities, and those who renounce pursuit of them because they always so turn out, yet continue to theorise on them as unattainable, as unknowable, are, he holds, in the same self-contradictory position and labouring under an essentially identical delusion. Between the unknowable which one seeks to render knowable by extra-scientific processes, and the unknowable which one cannot know by the methods of science and consequently abandons to methods of spec-

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ulation which science forbids, there is only the slightest and most shadowy of distinctions. All forms of belief in the unknowable,—although so many metaphysicians regard them as irreducible, just as zoologists so regarded animal species in the days of Cuvier,—are of the same nature and stages of the same evolutionary process.

Roberty denies the legitimacy of belief in the unknowable in all its forms, but combats it chiefly in such as are characteristic of the present age. Modern agnosticism he recognises, indeed, to be incapable of acting on humanity either for good or evil with anything like the power of the older agnostic systems. It seems to him to be even in the forms which have been given to it by Kant, Comte, and Spencer, unworthy of attention for any intrinsic merits. But he deems it to be of prime interest notwithstanding its inherent weakness and poverty, inasmuch as it is “the *last* citadel of metaphysics,”—“almost the only phantom of the theological past of humanity which has not been exorcised by science,”—“the only surviving chief of what M. Taine calls ‘the army of verbal entities which had formerly invaded all provinces of nature, and which during three hundred years the progress of science had been overthrowing one by one.’” When it is universally recognised to be a pseudo-concept, a merely “verbal entity,” and thinkers cease to occupy their minds with it, then, he holds, all science falsely so called will have at length come to be disowned, and all theological and metaphysical rubbish swept away. Positive science will receive

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the honour due to it, and a scientific philosophy capable of serving as an adequate basis to æsthetic and industrial art will begin to be constituted.

The state of positive science reached in any age has always been, according to Roberty, the determining cause of the character of the philosophy of the age. Religion was evolved from least knowledge, metaphysics through a further growth of knowledge, and contemporary agnosticism testifies by its very vagueness and emptiness to the pressure and predominance of science. But religion, metaphysics, and contemporary agnosticism are not stages of theorising which lead up to or pass into science. There is no natural or logical transition from the unknowable to the known. There has always been knowledge, and knowledge has always been positive, or in other words, of the nature of science, for there is no other knowledge. Contemporary agnosticism is no more occupied with an object of knowledge, and has no more a scientific character, than fetichism. The unknowable is altogether an illusion, and when examined always vanishes in the unknown. We know absolutely nothing of the limits which separate the certain domain of the unknown from the problematical domain of the unknowable.

Such is the general view of agnosticism presented in the able and suggestive works of M. de Roberty. It is just the view which we should naturally expect to be given by one who surveys the realm of knowledge from the particular intellectual standpoint which he occupies. Being not only an independent and cou-

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rageous but an exceptionally consistent and logical thinker, he is generally able in criticising the agnostic doctrines of the present day to show that those who propound them are not as faithful to their own principles as he himself is, but have involved themselves in contradictions which they should have, and which he has, avoided. His attacks on these doctrines are made from the same position on which their defenders stand, but which he easily proves that they have no right to occupy unless they surrender them; and so clearly has he, on the whole, consistency and reason on his side, that professed agnostics are much more likely to say nothing regarding his assaults than to attempt to reply to them.

Probably no one else has given so extensive a signification to the word agnosticism as he has done, but the way in which he employs it cannot be denied to be in entire accordance with his philosophical standpoint and principles. These being what they are, he is clearly entitled to regard all religionists and metaphysicians as well as all professors of the creed of nescience as agnostics. He has as much right to use the word in the very wide sense which he attaches to it as I have to use it in a much more restricted one. We both employ it in the same way, namely, with reference to what is deemed unknowable. While differing widely we differ only as to the limits within which knowledge lies. He denies and I affirm that men can attain, and have attained, to a knowledge of theological and metaphysical truths. To me there seems to be hardly any fact of which we may be, and



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ought to be, so certain as of the existence and government of a Supreme Being, omnipotent and omnipresent, omniscient and righteous. For thinking so M. de Roberty must include me among agnostics, seeing that he supposes that belief in God is never knowledge but always illusion. I, on the other hand, just because he thinks so—just because he deems to be necessarily illusion what I hold to be adequately evidenced truth—am compelled to consider him to be the real agnostic; one who would extrude from the realm of knowledge a province which rightfully belongs to it. This shows how relative and personal our views of agnosticism and applications of the term agnostic are, but it does not imply injustice on either side, or tend to obliterate differences, or to conceal or confuse any issues involved.

M. de Roberty has given expression to many original ideas, and formulated many interesting generalisations. He has traced with searching vision the main currents of human thought, and set in a fresh light the interrelations of the chief systems of speculation. He is especially instructive when he treats of the philosophical strivings of the present time, and has, perhaps, successfully shown that very much of what has been written about *the unknowable* by contemporary agnostics is as nonsensical as anything of an analogous kind which can be laid to the charge of medieval scholastics. What alone concerns us here, however, is the question, Has he made out that all metaphysics and all theology are of an agnostic character? And that question I can only answer in the negative.

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As to metaphysics, I can nowhere find that he clearly tells us what he means by it. That it was incumbent on him to do seeing that there are various and conflicting conceptions as to its subject and limits. It can surely not be held that in no sense which can reasonably be given to the word will it designate a section or province of real knowledge. And even should M. de Roberty be of that opinion he has not shown its correctness. To most of his readers his own works will assuredly be thought to consist largely of metaphysical reflections. The positions from which he reasons and the results at which he arrives are rarely the data or the generalisations of physical science; they are, in the plain etymological sense of the term, *metaphysical views*, although they may have a reference to *physical facts*. How any sort of theorising as to the attainability of knowledge or as to the merits or demerits of knowledge can be other than metaphysical in character is so difficult to understand that it should not be left unexplained by one who believes in its possibility—which I do not. Wherever thought is, even although it be thought about objects of sense, there is something, and even much, which is real, and yet not physical but metaphysical.

As to theology also M. de Roberty seems to me to have wholly failed to justify his inclusion of it in agnosticism, although his consistency in regarding and describing it as agnosticism be unquestionable. Anti-theological agnostics would almost seem to have entered into a conspiracy not to adopt the only method

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of establishing the truth of their own doctrine which can possibly be satisfactory. Instead of applying themselves to show that the alleged rational bases of theology are unsound, they, with comparatively few exceptions, prefer to adduce reasons for declining the task so obviously incumbent on them. They too often deem it sufficient to assume that it is one which is unnecessary in the present enlightened age, or to assert that there can be no knowledge except within empirical laws. M. de Roberty attempts to do more, but to little purpose. He lays down as a psychological discovery of his own what he calls "the law of the identity of super-abstract contraries." What he means thereby is that such lofty abstract correlatives as God and the universe, noumenon and phenomenon, infinite and finite, absolute and relative, although apparently opposed, are really equivalent and synonymous. And from this law he concludes that the word God signifies only the universe or an abstract idea of it, the infinite only the pure or abstract finite, &c. Of course, were it so theology could only be a science falsely so called, one exclusively occupied with illusions generated by the inherent weakness and fallaciousness of human thought.

But is it so? Rather, is not the alleged law a mere paradox? Our author, at least, has not yet shown it to be anything else. Certainly he has in no way proved it, and it may well be doubted if he has persuaded a single individual to believe in the truth of it. So long as he has not proved it, or shown theologians that what they consider to be evidences of

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God's agency in the physical universe, in historical development, and spiritual experience have been misinterpreted by them, he cannot be held to have made out that theology is a species of agnosticism.

### VII. CRITICISM OF LESLIE STEPHEN'S VIEWS OF AGNOSTICISM.

There is yet another view of agnosticism which it appears to me ought to be rejected. It proceeds on the assumption that the attitude of the mind to knowledge may be fairly described as either gnostic or agnostic; that every individual thinker who is not an agnostic must be a gnostic. This view Mr. Leslie Stephen has adopted. Hence his "Agnostic's Apology" begins thus:—

"The name Agnostic, originally coined by Professor Huxley about 1869, has gained general acceptance. It is sometimes used to indicate the philosophical theory which Mr. Herbert Spencer, as he tells us, developed from the doctrine of Hamilton and Mansel. Upon that theory I express no opinion. I take the word in a vaguer sense, and am glad to believe that its use indicates an advance in the courtesies of controversy. The old theological phrase for an intellectual opponent was Atheist—a name which still retains a certain flavour as of the stake in this world and hell-fire in the next, and which, moreover, implies an inaccuracy of some importance. Dogmatic Atheism—the doctrine that there is no God, whatever may be meant by God—is, to say the least, a rare phase of opinion. The word Agnosticism, on the other hand, seems to imply a fairly accurate representation of a form of creed already common and daily spreading. The Agnostic is one who asserts—what no one denies—that there are limits to the sphere of human intelligence. He asserts, further, what

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many theologians have expressly maintained, that those limits are such as to exclude at least what Lewes calls 'metempirical' knowledge. But he goes further and asserts, in opposition to theologians, that theology lies within this forbidden sphere. This last assertion raises the important issue; and, though I have no pretension to invent an opposition nickname, I may venture, for the purposes of this article, to describe the rival school as Gnostics. The Gnostic holds that 'our reason can, in some sense, transcend the narrow limits of experience. He holds that we can attain truths not capable of verification, and not needing verification, by actual experiment or verification. He holds, further, that a knowledge of those truths is essential to the highest interests of mankind, and enables us in some sort to solve the dark riddle of the universe.'<sup>1</sup>

With much that is said there I cannot agree. The substitution of the name agnostic for atheist may indicate no advance in the courtesies of controversy. The application of the term gnostic to all who are not atheistic may be deemed to indicate the opposite. There may have been a lack of courtesy shown by the early Christian writers who turned into a nickname the name of gnostic which some of their adversaries applied to themselves as a title of honour; but surely to call all who are not atheists gnostics, a name which has never been so used before, and which has been in bad repute among Christians almost since the days of St. Paul, is still less courteous. The term atheist must be admitted to have been often applied in a reckless and unjust way, but to say that it was "the old theological phrase for an intellectual opponent" is itself not an accurate or fair statement. The "flavour"

<sup>1</sup> *An Agnostic's Apology and Other Essays*, pp. 1, 2.

## MR. STEPHEN'S VIEW EXAMINED

of which Mr. Stephen speaks is not inherent in the word, and is felt only by the vulgar, to whom the term agnostic, when employed as equivalent to atheist, will have just the same flavour.

The word atheist is a thoroughly honest, unambiguous term. It means one who does not believe in God, and it means neither more nor less. It implies neither blame nor approval, neither desert of punishment nor of reward. If a purely dogmatic atheism be a rare phase of opinion critical atheism is a very common one, and there is also a form of atheism not uncommon which is professedly sceptical or agnostic, but often in reality dogmatic or gnostic.

So far from the word agnosticism, on the other hand, implying, as Mr. Stephen says, a fairly accurate representation of a creed which asserts that theology falls without the sphere of knowledge, it has no special reference whatever to theology. It denotes merely a theory of knowledge, and so may apply to any or every sphere of conceivable existence; but it no more implies theology to be beyond the limits of human intelligence than physiology or psychology. An agnostic may be either a theist or an atheist. There are theological as well as anti-theological agnostics; and to call the former gnostics is as manifestly an abuse of language as it would be to call the latter so.

Mr. Stephen's attempted delineation of a gnostic is not a recognisable likeness. "The gnostic holds that our reason can, in some measure, transcend the narrow limits of experience." And so do many ag-



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nostics, including, I imagine, Mr. Stephen himself. Experience! What sort of experience? Does Mr. Stephen hold that human reason cannot transcend the narrow limits of sense-experience? If so, it is clear that he ought to sacrifice to his agnosticism mathematical, mental, and moral science, as they all transcend the narrow limits of such experience. If not, he is not entitled to assume that religion and theology themselves may not lie within the limits of a real although non-sensuous experience. No cautious thinker will affirm that reason can transcend the limits of all experience, seeing that the only known limits of universal experience are the laws of reason itself. Experience extends just so far as reason can go without violating its own laws, and so ceasing to be reasonable. A man who simply asserts that reason cannot transcend this or that species of experience is a pure dogmatist; he may call himself in good faith an agnostic, but is really a gnostic, so befogged as not to know what or where he is.

“He” (the gnostic), Mr. Stephen further says, “holds that we can attain truths not capable of verification, and not needing verification, by actual experiment or verification.” This trait also is not distinctive of theologians, Mr. Stephen’s so-called gnostics. Speaking generally, they neither hold religious truth to be incapable of verification nor to be without need of it. They hold, on the contrary, that religious truth can and ought to be verified. They have always done so more or less; and at the present day their best representatives are characterised by the earnestness

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with which they insist on the importance of verification in religion. But, of course, they maintain at the same time that the verification must be of an appropriate kind—one which has a real and intelligible relation to the nature of religious truth and of religious experience. If the verification demanded be that of physical sensible experience, then the deductions of the mathematician and the inductions of the historian are unverifiable, and all that claims to be mental or moral truth must be rejected by science. Colours are not to be discriminated by the same organ and processes as sounds; physics and chemistry apply different standards and tests; and religion is in like manner to be judged by criteria which can be reasonably applied to it. To ask that spiritual truth should be verified by a sensible experimental proof is to ask what is self-contradictory—namely, that such truth should be both what it is and is not, both spiritual and physical. As spiritual it can only be verified by spiritual beings through spiritual perceptions and experiences. That it cannot be verified at all is a mere dogmatic assertion. No proof or verification has ever been given of that assertion.

Mr. Stephen adds: “he” (the gnostic) “holds, further, that a knowledge of those truths” (“metempirical” truths) “is essential to the highest interests of mankind, and enables us in some sort to solve the dark riddle of the universe.” The addition is not an improvement. The sole essential difference of opinion between the agnostic and his opponent is as to the attainability or unattainability of truth beyond cer-

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tain limits; the value of truth is not in question. The agnostic does not deny that a reliable knowledge of God, were it attained, would be of high value, and could not fail to dispel much darkness. Real knowledge of every kind is useful and enlightening. Belief in the value of truth is common to agnostic and gnostic, and hence should have had no place assigned to it in Mr. Stephen's definition of a gnostic. The introduction of it serves no legitimate end, although it may give some slight colour of relevancy to various assertions and reasonings which are really irrelevant in "An Agnostic's Apology."

What I wish, however, chiefly to emphasise in connection with the view under consideration is that the terms agnosticism and gnosticism can only be reasonably understood by the generality of thinkers as of the same character as, for example, empiricism and rationalism, individualism and socialism, scepticism and dogmatism. That is to say, they belong to the class of words which denote extreme and contrary tendencies, widely divergent and opposed schemes of thought, the narrowness and exclusiveness of which wise men endeavour to avoid. It is between such antithetic extremes as such words denote that the general course of belief, and the main movements of thought, and far the larger portion of knowledge acquired by speculation and research, are to be found.

The philosophical world is happily not divided into empiricists and rationalists,—those who would evolve all knowledge out of sensation and those who would resolve it all into reason. Hardly any are purely em-

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piricists or exclusively rationalists. Many, indeed, ascribe so much to sense and so little to reason, and many others so much to reason and so little to sense, that they can without injustice be characterised as empiricists and rationalists respectively, if it be sufficiently recognised that they alike allow to some extent both sense and reason to be constituents of knowledge. The great majority of philosophers, however, attach so much weight to both the empirical and the rationalist elements of knowledge that to describe them as either empiricists or rationalists is manifestly unfair.

The social world, in like manner, cannot be reasonably divided, as so many socialists would have us do, into socialists and individualists,—themselves and others,—the sheep and goats of humanity. Those who call themselves, or can justly be called, individualists are few; and of those who call themselves socialists a considerable number appeal more to individual selfishness than those whom they denounce as individualists, and an even greater number designate themselves socialists largely from aversion to being designated by others individualists. The pretenders to the name of socialists outnumber those who are entitled to it, and of those who are entitled to it comparatively few are students of social or any other science. The real students of the social sciences, for the most part, regard both individualism and socialism as irrational and dangerous aberrations.

At the present day many profess to be agnostics, but no one will allow that he is a gnostic. The latter

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designation is old, and it early ceased to be regarded as complimentary. The former being of recent invention, is as yet comparatively unsuggestive of obnoxious associations such as cling to the terms gnostic, sceptic, and dogmatist. It is to this circumstance, and especially to the discredit into which the term sceptic has fallen, not to its own merits, that it owes most of what popularity it possesses. Inevitably, however, disagreeable associations will in course of time attach themselves also to it. The inherent defects of agnosticism are sufficient of themselves to ensure this. The eagerness of atheists to exchange their own name for that of agnostics must hasten the degradation of the latter term. A reckless application of the term gnostics to theists can only tend to the same end. It is desirable that the term agnostic should be as long as possible kept as pure as possible. Those who feel so will not, I think, approve of Mr. Leslie Stephen's use of it.

The antithesis of scepticism and dogmatism coincides to a great extent with that of agnosticism and gnosticism. The former refers more directly to the subjective and the latter to the objective side or aspect of the same contrast; the one more to the disposition and attitude of the mind towards knowledge, and the other more to the range and limits of knowledge in relation to the mind. Whenever they are usefully employed both sets of terms imply the same antithesis and denote the same extremes.

The words scepticism and dogmatism in themselves imply nothing excessive, defective, or blamable. Re-

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garded simply from an etymological point of view, scepticism may quite reasonably be defined as the search for truth and dogmatism as the holding of truth. Unfortunately when so defined they are useless. They indicate no contrast; seeking truth is not the antithesis but the condition of finding it. And, further, the history of the words has made it impossible for us so to employ them. Although *δογματιζεῖν* and *δογματικός* did not originally suggest intellectual rashness, opinionativeness, over-confidence, and therefore did not signify what we now mean by *dogmatising* and *dogmatical*, nor did *σκέψις* and *σκεπτικός* imply excessive doubt of the existence or attainability of truth or aversion to recognise evidence, and therefore did not mean *scepticism* or *sceptical* in their current sense, they naturally and inevitably acquired those unfavourable implications, and had their significations determined accordingly.

The majority of the Greek philosophers of post-Socratic times were characterised by all that is implied in the worst sense of the word dogmatism. They were divided into contentious, self-assertive, proselytising schools, each so very sure of possessing the whole truth, and so unwilling to allow that others might have a share of it, that many persons felt doubtful if there were any such thing as truth, and at least if truth were discoverable. Hence the rise of a school of reasoners against reason, ready to dispute everything, and professing either to be certain only that nothing was certain or that not even that was certain. Hence, also, the words dogmatism and dog-



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matic, scepticism and sceptical, came to denote two opposed extremes of philosophical temper, tendency, and opinion. They are of service to denote the extremes; but it is unwarrantable to represent every philosophical system as a form either of dogmatism or of scepticism and all philosophers as either dogmatists or sceptics. Could that be done with justice all philosophy would be abnormal and extravagant. Every cautious, circumspect, essentially sane and catholic philosophy is neither dogmatic nor sceptical.

## CHAPTER III

### HISTORY OF AGNOSTICISM

#### I. INTRODUCTORY. ORIENTAL AGNOSTICISM

AGNOSTICISM is not merely a kind of theorising, but also a historical fact, and one of considerable magnitude, importance, and interest. It is older than Christianity or than any European nation, and has followed a course just as real and traceable as that of a religion or a kingdom. It has passed through a variety of stages, assumed many forms, been at sundry times prevalent, and shows at the present day no signs of exhaustion. It has commended itself to men of very different types of character, and its leading representatives have been distinguished in philosophy, theology, science, literature, and even in politics and other spheres of practical life. It is clearly not a mere creation of human wilfulness or exemplification of human folly, but a something deep rooted in the nature of the human spirit, and hence also a social force, a power capable of moulding thought, influencing action, affecting the general course of man's development, and serving providential ends. Hence it is only by the unreflecting that it will be contemptuously, impatiently, or wrathfully treated; from others who feel called to deal with it, even on the whole

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unfavourably, it will receive careful and respectful consideration.

Throughout the present work it will be constantly necessary to refer to historical forms of agnosticism—to the views and tenets of individual agnostics or of particular agnostic schools. To discuss the subject of it in a merely indefinite and general way would be useless and unjust. Agnosticism is so vague and variable that to attempt to reason on it in itself, apart from its actual manifestations, must be futile. It now seems requisite, therefore, to cast a rapid glance over the history of agnosticism, to note its chief stages, and to name or characterise the more famous of its representatives. Even a mere outline of the kind will be better than none. It must help the reader to form a fairly adequate idea of what agnosticism is as here understood; let him know who its chief advocates have been, so that he may make himself acquainted with their pleadings if so inclined; and indicate to him what was the place occupied in agnostic history by those agnostic theorists whose views he finds subjected in our pages to special criticism.

While agnosticism is old, it is far from as old as thought, or even as old as either religion or philosophy. Man is naturally less critical or sceptical than imaginative and credulous. He readily satisfies his curiosity with conjectures, and is apt to believe whatever he is told. The lower religions manifest the extraordinary credulity of those who accept them. It is only at a comparatively advanced stage that religious beliefs are seriously tested with reference to

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their truth or falsehood. Before there arises an earnest demand for rationality and evidence there must be the felt want of them which springs from doubt: hence the spiritual necessity, the religious importance, of doubt in beings so constituted and circumstanced as men are.

The oldest historical forms of philosophy similarly exhibit the most evident marks of having originated in a reason too easily satisfied and overweeningly confident in its own strength. "Had'men," says Comte, "not begun by an exaggerated estimate of what they could do, they would never have done all they were capable of. It has to be added that their pride was chiefly due to their inevitable ignorance—their excessive confidence to their defective experience. If they had been critical or sceptical—if they had clearly seen how difficult were the problems with which they proposed to deal and how inadequate for their solution were the means at their disposal—they would certainly never have begun to philosophise at all; but this they could not be, could not see, the humility and the knowledge which it implied being only attainable through the experience acquired in the course of continuous philosophising itself. They began in the only way in which they could begin with such knowledge and methods as they possessed.

The earliest philosophies were those which most boldly undertook to explain mysteries the most profound and to grapple with questions the most inaccessible; and it was through this boldness that they came into conflict with contemporaneous religions.

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They had the courage to assail and the ambition to seek to supply the place of these religions. Hence intellectual struggles which led to doubts of the truth both of religion and of philosophy. This result was, of course, sooner reached where philosophy started, as in Greece, from an independent rational basis, than where, as in India, it grew directly out of religion.

The conflicts and contradictions of philosophical systems, all largely at variance with experience, greatly contributed to the rise of scepticism. Indeed, it was only when philosophical systems of the too venturesome and speculative type had discredited one another that doubt or disbelief of a properly sceptical or agnostic nature could arise. Doubt and disbelief are only sceptical or agnostic when they attempt to justify themselves by a distinctive kind of philosophic theorising.

The history of agnosticism has been divided into three periods—the Oriental, the Classical, and the Modern. The division is a convenient one; but the first period was only of a rudimentary character. It presents us merely with approximations to agnosticism, not with distinct forms of it. Palestine, China, and India are the oriental lands in which the closest approximations of the kind appeared. So far as has yet been shown, the question, What are the limits of human knowledge? was not specially discussed, or even distinctly raised, by any ancient Egyptian, Chaldean, or Persian sage, deeply impressed although many of them cannot fail to have been with the littleness of their own knowledge and the uncertainty of

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much which passed among their contemporaries as knowledge.

The Hebrews had no philosophy, and consequently no philosophical scepticism, no scepticism in the sense of agnosticism; but in the post-exilian period of their history scepticism in a more general sense—a scepticism of a spiritual and practical, not speculative and theoretical kind, which expressed itself in the most earnest questionings and gravest doubts as to the relation of sin and suffering and the consistency of the facts of life with Divine goodness and justice—was far from unknown among them. Their dim and dubious views of a future existence caused suffering virtue and prosperous wickedness to be peculiarly inexplicable and harassing facts even to the most pious among them. These facts gave rise to almost all that can be called even in popular language scepticism in the Bible,—such scepticism as found utterance for itself in Psalms lxxiii., lxxxviii., and lxxxix., in sundry sentences of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Malachi, and in the Books of Job and Ecclesiastes. In the Book of Job all the theories of providence and retribution current among the Hebrews are seriously examined and their weaknesses boldly exposed. Ecclesiastes (*Koheleth*) is more pessimistic than sceptical, but its pessimism springs from a keen sense of the feebleness and fallibility of human reason and of the complexity, mysteriousness, and apparent confusion and planlessness of nature and history. “The Preacher” perceives in all spheres of existence, in all apparent good, in all human aims and efforts, self-contradictio-



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riness, deceptiveness, fruitlessness, and, in a word, proofs and illustrations of his text,—“Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”

Chinese scepticism as found in Confucianism somewhat resembles that of modern Positivism, being what is negative in a system of ethical naturalism; in Taoism it is a denial of the possibility of knowing an Absolute Personal Cause; and in Fohism it has the character proper to Buddhism. So far as it presents itself in what the Chinese regard as their classical writings, it cannot be properly described, I think, as agnostic.

Even in India agnosticism did not attain to a distinct and separate form of existence, but grew out of the dogmatic idealisms which sprang up in that land and remained always dependent on them. It is in the writings of the Vedanta school of philosophy that it is most conspicuous; and the Vedanta philosophy is the most developed and influential of the Hindu philosophies. It rests on the idea that there is but one existence, the universal soul; and to defend this assumption it has to maintain that all the objects of the material world and all separate souls are illusions produced by ignorance or false conceptions: in other words, it is a pantheism which issues in acosmism, and makes use of a partial agnosticism to protect and justify itself. All that the great majority of modern agnostics accept as the only region within which knowledge is attainable, Vedantists consider to be entirely the territory of ignorance. A follower of Vyâsa and Sankara can only view the exactest observations

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of modern science as false conceptions, and the discoveries of which it is proudest as vain illusions.

Buddhism in its original form was more imbued with the agnostic spirit than any other religion has been. It recognised and appreciated only a kind of knowledge which involved the negation and repudiation of all other knowledge. It virtually identified true knowledge with what it inculcated as saving faith. Right beliefs, according to Buddha, were just right views,—those which when truly appropriated through the personal effort and contemplation of the believer naturally led to right words, right feelings, right acts, right dispositions, and all else that is right, and so led to the chief good,—deliverance from all that is temporal and phenomenal, from birth and death, desire and pain, individuality, consciousness, and change. Its pessimistic conception of life was conjoined with the agnostic conviction that insight into the nothingness of existence is the absolute truth, the sum of truth, and that ordinary knowledge and so-called science are a portion of the burden of falsehood and vanity from which deliverance is to be gained by following the “noble path” revealed by Buddha. While identifying faith and knowledge Buddhism assigned to both a singularly contracted sphere; while a severe ethical rationalism it was agnostic and pessimistic in its attitude towards all that constitutes and characterises existence and life. This view of Buddhism, it must be observed, is meant to apply only to its original and philosophical form,—one widely different in various respects from modern

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German agnostic pessimism, yet almost certainly more like to it than to the modern Buddhistic religions of the East. With the myths and legends, fictions and dogmas of the latter, the historian of agnosticism has no concern.<sup>1</sup>

### II. GRECO-ROMAN AGNOSTICISM. PRE-SOCRATIC OR PRELIMINARY PERIOD

We now pass to the Greek or Greco-Roman period of agnostic history. The agnosticism of this period was almost entirely a product of the Greek intellect, an outgrowth of Greek philosophy, although the principles and conclusions of it came to be known and to have their influence felt throughout the Roman world. It owed its being and form, its ingenuity, thorough-

<sup>1</sup> Owen treats of Hebrew, Hindu, and Buddhist scepticism in *Evenings with the Sceptics*, vol. i. pp. 367-450. In connection with a sketch like the present it would be inappropriate, I think, to give references to the literature regarding so-called Chinese, Hindu, or Buddhist scepticism. As to so-called "Hebrew Scepticism," it may suffice to mention the following English works: (1) Wright, *Book of Koheleth* (Donellan Lecture, 1883); (2) Cheyne, *Job and Solomon*, 1887; (3) Plumptre, *Ecclesiastes* (Camb. Bib. Series), 1892; (4) A. B. Davidson, *The Book of Job* (C.B.S.), 1893; (5) Momerie, *Agnosticism* (Part II. Ecclesiastes), 4th ed.; (6) Wenley, *Aspects of Pessimism* (Jewish Pessimism, pp. 1-50), 1894; (7) Dillon, *The Sceptics of the Old Testament*, 1895. The reason why Dr. Dillon pronounces "Job," "Koheleth," and "Agur" to be "sceptics" is that "all three reject the dogma of retribution, the doctrine of eternal life, and belief in the coming of a Messiah, over and above which they at times strip the notion of God of its most essential attributes, reducing it to the shadow of a mere intellectual abstraction" (p. 10). The word "reject" is too strong; and even mere *rejection*, however explicit, of the "dogma," "doctrine," and "belief" mentioned would not be scepticism in the special sense of the term.

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ness, and comprehensiveness, to the love of inquiry and the speculative qualities of the Grecian mind, although a long course of historical preparation and a variety of occasional causes concurred with these to secure and perfect its solution. Its history may be divided into Pre-Socratic or Preliminary and Post-Socratic or Developed. It is a history which has been the subject of an immense amount of disquisition and research.

In Greece, as everywhere else, agnosticism was preceded by dogmatism. The earliest Greek philosophers were cosmologists. They began with external nature; sought to find out what was the primary substance of the world; and tried to explain how the world came to attain its present condition and contents. Their aim was not only legitimate but grand, and their efforts to attain it proved wonderfully inspiring. But their own systems were necessarily crude and conjectural, discordant and contradictory. Hence although they were neither agnostic in themselves nor directly tended to agnosticism, they indirectly led to it both by their one-sidedness and by their conflicting findings. The immediate successors of these philosophers were forced to be more critical, and especially compelled to inquire how appearance and reality are to be distinguished and how they are related. This, in turn, raised the question how knowledge and opinion differ, if they differ. A most formidable question! It could not be got rid of; the adherents of all systems felt vitally interested in finding an answer to it; yet no one did answer it in a way which commanded gen-

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eral assent. Hence a sense of the difficulty of determining the true sphere of knowledge increasingly deepened and spread among Greek thinkers. Hence also the later Pre-Socratic systems of Greek philosophy mostly tended directly to generate agnosticism.

Greek Eleatic philosophy involved agnosticism in the same way that Hindu Vedantic philosophy did so. Its doctrine of unity implied the impossibility of plurality and change, the unreality of space and time and motion, the non-existence of material objects, and the delusiveness of the senses. All these conclusions Parmenides actually deduced from it and expressly inculcated. And one of his disciples, Zeno of Elea, argued so ingeniously against the possibility of plurality and motion, that although many of the ablest logicians from Aristotle to the present day have undertaken to show the fallaciousness of his reasonings, there is even yet no general agreement as to wherein their fallaciousness lies, and not a few of those who have treated of them have come to the conclusion that they cannot be answered. Sir William Hamilton, for example, says "that they at least show that the possibility of motion, however certain as a fact, cannot be conceived possible, as it involves a contradiction."<sup>1</sup> If they really proved that, they must also, it seems to me, have proved that motion itself is neither possible nor certain. But that Sir William Hamilton could imagine them to have irrefutably proved so much may help us to realise what a great advance towards scepticism proper Zeno must

<sup>1</sup> *Lectures on Metaphysics*, vol. ii. p. 373.

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have made. The Eleatic philosophy, like the Vedantist philosophy, clearly shows that such scepticism is not exclusively dependent, as Saisset and others have affirmed, on sensualism; it may spring as directly and necessarily from idealism and ontologism.

The Heraclitean philosophy was essentially antagonistic to the Eleatic, but not less exclusive or less favourable to scepticism. What it recognised everywhere was not being but becoming, not unity but plurality, not immobility but ceaseless motion. It denied what Eleaticism affirmed, and affirmed what it denied; but it denied as much; its negations and doubts were as fundamental and comprehensive. Ænesidemus, one of the most renowned of the Greek sceptics, is reported to have attached himself to the Heraclitean system in his later years; and this might well be, as the Heraclitean tenets of a perpetual flux, and of a self-contradictoriness inherent alike in all things and in all thoughts, are thoroughly sceptical.

Some students of Greek scepticism consider that the materialistic philosophy propounded by Democritus exerted an even greater influence in its formation and development than either the Eleatic or the Heraclitean. It may have been so; but it is enough here to say merely that its influence on them was undoubtedly very great. When a professed materialist like Democritus, who explained all things by the interconnection and interaction of physical atoms, also taught that the senses are incapable of apprehending truth, and that nothing is known of reality, the true nature



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even of empirical objects, he did more to discredit sensuous knowledge at least than those who endeavoured to theorise with less reference to it. He has been ranked both among the sophists and among the sceptics of Greece, erroneously indeed but not inexplicably; and it is certain that alike the sophist Protagoras and the sceptic Ænesidemus were largely his disciples.

The last stage of Greek Pre-Socratic philosophy was that which is known as the age of the sophists. It was an age of great and varied intellectual and practical activity; an age of high culture, of famous men, and of brilliant achievements in policy, war, and art; but also an age in which the Greeks had grown dissatisfied with tradition and authority in matters of morals and religion, and had likewise lost confidence in the power of reason and of philosophy to replace them and to supply their defects; in which self-interest, vanity, and ambition were the ruling motives of action, while self-sacrifice and the pure love of virtue were rare; and in which the clever advocacy of a bad cause was more admired than the most honest truth-search. It was natural that the sophists should appear and flourish in such an age. They exemplified instead of opposing its predominant evil tendencies. They ministered to some of its real wants and rendered considerable services to learning and culture. Their want of faith, however, in any absolute truth or goodness made them all the readier and abler to supply reasons for or against any opinion whatever.

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Were the sophists sceptics proper, genuine agnostics? Certainly not in so far as they were insincere and dishonest in their professions of doubt or unbelief. No real sceptic should be identified with a sophist in the discreditable sense acquired by the term. The sophist is a man who does not care for truth, and so is ready to argue either for or against any thesis or cause. The sceptic really doubts or disbelieves the possibility of attaining truth, and argues on behalf of such doubt or disbelief. But the Greek sophists were manifestly the precursors of the Greek sceptics. They so combated the conclusions of each school of philosophy by the arguments of another as to produce the impression that all philosophy was a deception; so exaggerated the relativity alike of sense and of thought as to leave no room for a reasonable trust in the certainty of any kind of knowledge. They appropriated and popularised whatever was sceptical in the teaching of the earlier philosophers, and employed all that was favourable to scepticism in their logical methods. Further, some of the Greek sophists seem to have been almost, if not altogether, indistinguishable from real sceptics. A Protagoras and a Gorgias, for example, appear to have been about as thoroughly agnostic as human nature has allowed almost any human beings to be. There is not sufficient evidence to prove them to have been insincere; and it is difficult to see that the respects in which their teaching differed from that of the Pyrrhonian, Academic, or Empiricist sceptics ought to prevent us from regarding it as truly sceptical.

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There are times when philosophy appears to die, and to rise again out of its own ashes. Its epochs of renaissance have been generally preceded by a wide diffusion of indifferentism and of scepticism. The mind cannot rest in doubt, and so is impelled by its pressure to seek the more earnestly for certitude. It perceives that the deepest doubts do not disprove the existence of truth, but merely the depth of the well in which it is contained. Hence there appeared amidst the sophists a Socrates to inaugurate a new era of philosophy, in which almost all the great questions with which human thought has since been occupied were to be raised and discussed in a way which has profoundly influenced the spirit and life of mankind. Plato followed up the movement with wonderful genius and effectiveness. Aristotle made the first and perhaps the most remarkable of attempts to elaborate a universal system of science on philosophical principles. Various schools of philosophy arose, the disciples of which actively and successfully propagated their respective tenets as to God, nature, man, the laws of reason and of morals, the chief good and how to attain it. But there were few subjects on which general agreement of opinion was reached; the new philosophies proved as discordant and conflicting as those which preceded them had been; and so scepticism reappeared, and at length assumed its proper or strictly agnostic form.

## PYRRHONISM

### III. POST-SOCRATIC OR DEVELOPED PERIOD

Pyrrho of Elis, a contemporary of Alexander the Great and of Aristotle, is generally regarded as the founder of Greek theoretical scepticism. From him *Pyrrhonism* became the ordinary Greek, mediæval, and even, until the close of last century, modern designation for such scepticism. He left no written exposition of his views, but his disciple Timon of Phlius transmitted to the world what little is known of them. The deep impression which Pyrrho made by maintaining them is only explicable by their having been clearly thought out and ingeniously defended. His philosophy centred in the belief that nothing can be known, and that nothing should be either affirmed or denied, regarding the natures of things, not even whether they exist or not. It was one not of the negation of a knowledge of things but simply of doubt; it was one, however, of complete doubt, of entire suspense of judgment, as to what things are or whether things are or are not. It did not, of course, exclude assent to phenomena or appearances considered merely as states of consciousness. Among immediate disciples of Pyrrho were, in addition to Timon, Eurylochus, Philo of Athens, Nausiphanes, and Hecataeus of Abdera; and among immediate disciples of Timon, Dioscurides of Cyprus, Nicolochus of Rhodes, Uphrenor of Seleucus, Praylus, and Xanthus.

Arcesilaos (B.C. 316-240) introduced into the Platonic school a scepticism closely akin to that of Pyrrho, and thereby founded the so-called Second or Mid-

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dle Academy. He not only began, as Socrates and Plato had done, with doubt, but ended with it, which they did not. The starting-point of his scepticism seems to have been opposition to the Stoic view of the criterion of truth; but he was led on to deny that there could be any criterion of truth, or any certitude. Like Pyrrho, he doubted the possibility of knowledge, and inculcated as to all that pretended to be knowledge a total suspension of judgment. He said "he knew nothing absolutely, not even that he knew nothing." He felt, however, that his agnosticism required mitigation so far as ordinary life was concerned; that a distinction must be drawn between speculation and practice, and that, whatever be the conclusions of the former, grounds must be found for satisfying the claims of the latter. Hence while holding that we cannot truly know aught about the natures of things, he argued that we are not thereby reduced either to entire or to irrational activity, seeing that among the apparent grounds for choosing and rejecting actions or courses of action there is enough of difference to enable us to rule our choices and refusals and our conduct generally in a wise and prudent way,—or, so as to act rightly and be happy. What he thus regarded as the guide of life he called *the reasonable* (τὸ εὐλογον), which has been generally identified with *the probable* (τὸ πιθανόν) of Carneades. That they were not identical seems to have been satisfactorily proved by Hirzel; but we may, perhaps, still regard Arcesilaos as the originator of the doctrine of probabilism. The *reasonableness*

## CARNEADES

which he accepted while denying knowledge and certainty necessarily implied that probability was the guide of life.

Arcesilaos was succeeded in the direction of his school by Lacydes, Lacydes by Evander, Evander by Hegesinus, and Hegesinus by Carneades. Of the first three we know almost nothing except the names and the names of some of their disciples. But it is far otherwise as regards the fourth. He was not only the most distinguished successor of Arcesilaos, but himself a still more remarkable and celebrated man; and Cicero and Sextus Empiricus have made us fairly acquainted with his opinions.

Carneades possessed talents of a high order, a mind of amazing vigour and versatility. He was a great orator, a consummate dialectician, a singularly ingenious and subtle critic, and almost irresistible in debate. We have no reason to suppose that his genius was unfitted for the work of construction, but it was specially fitted for the work of destruction, and into that he threw himself with all the energy and ardour of his strong and vehement nature. Necessarily the incessant assaults of such a man on the dogmatic systems and tendencies of his time greatly influenced the minds of his contemporaries, and even those of subsequent thinkers.

Carneades endeavoured to confirm and develop the doctrine of Arcesilaos as to the criterion of evidence. He assailed the various hypotheses maintained by the dogmatists of his day on that subject, and laboured to prove that neither sense nor reason supplies any sure



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sign of truth, any reliable test by which we can certainly distinguish between the semblance and the reality of knowledge.

He was, it must be further noted, one of the few Greek sceptics known to have occupied themselves specially with investigation into the grounds of religion. He subjected them to a serious criticism, and one not unsuccessful in so far as it dealt with Stoic and Epicurean opinions. He attempted to refute the argument in favour of religion drawn from its universality, and entirely rejected the theory of final causes. He sought to show that the idea of God is a self-contradictory one, seeing that God can only be believed in as a moral being, yet cannot be conceived of as such, since morality implies imperfection overcome, and cannot be thought of as either finite or infinite, although He must be either the one or the other. The most important portion of his theological argumentation was his adverse criticism of the doctrine of providence. It contained almost all the weightier of the objections which have since been urged against it.

Carneades greatly developed the doctrine of probabilism. While denying the possibility of attaining to certainty, he maintained that a measure of probability may be reached sufficient for the regulation of practical life. The source of such probability, he argued, could not be in the object, for that is unknown; but must be in the subject, the mind which thinks it knows. According as the mind is more or less vividly impressed, or apprehends appearances as accord-

## HIS DOCTRINE OF PROBABILISM

ant or discordant, as permanent or evanescent, it will naturally and reasonably place more or less trust in its sensations and perceptions—in other words, will regard them as more or less probable, and will act on them with more or less confidence. Carneades seems to have been the first to endeavour to determine what were the conditions and degrees of probability. He represented the degrees as corresponding to the conditions, the lowest degree being that in which only a single condition is fulfilled, and the highest that in which all the conditions are fulfilled. The highest degree of probability is the best attainable criterion of belief and the best attainable rule of action. Carneades elaborated his doctrine of probability in order to meet objections which were waged against his denial of certainty, and so to give plausibility to his scepticism. He rendered by it, however, good service to philosophy. The subject of probability is a very important one both in logic and in ethics. The scepticism of Carneades lay in his teaching regarding certainty, not in his teaching regarding probability.

His successors, Clitomachus, Charmidas, and Philo of Larissa, were much inferior to him, and carried on the war against dogmatism in a languid and ineffective way. With Antiochus of Askelon scepticism even ceased to be dominant in the teaching of the Academy, and became subordinate to eclecticism. Dogmatism in the form of Stoicism acquired ascendancy in the Greco-Roman world. But its triumph was not complete. It even gave rise to a revival of Pyrrhon-

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ism,—to an attempt to develop a decided and thoroughly consistent scepticism.

Ænesidemus of Cnossus, a man of very acute and subtle intellect, was the originator of the movement, and so is known as the founder of the New Sceptical School. There is great difference of opinion as to the time at which he lived. The best supported view is, I think, that which would make him a contemporary of Cicero. He taught at Alexandria.

Ænesidemus restated and defended the Pyrrhonic as opposed to the Academic position. He maintained that we are not entitled either to affirm or deny anything regarding things; that we have no right to do the one more than the other; and that the Academicians, when they pronounced things to be incomprehensible, and the knowledge of them to be unattainable, erred and showed themselves to be not genuine sceptics. A consistent sceptic can affirm nothing as to the truth of which he is always in search.

Such was the way in which Ænesidemus and the neo-sceptics distinguished their philosophical point of view from that of the Academics. And the validity of the distinction has been generally conceded. To me it seems null or deceptive. The philosophical standpoint of Ænesidemus, Agrippa, and Sextus Empiricus was, I hold, not essentially different from that of such Academicians as Arcesilaos and Carneades. The sceptical Academicians affirmed truth to be incomprehensible, knowledge to be unattainable, and thereby exposed themselves to the charge of inconsistency and self-contradiction brought against them

## ÆNESIDEMUS AND THE NEO-SCEPTICS

both by the dogmatists and the neo-sceptics of their time,—the charge of declaring a universal proposition to be true, and known to be true, the subject of which they nevertheless asserted to be incomprehensible and unknowable. The answer which they gave to it was that they did not know even that they knew nothing; that their universal proposition itself was not to be taken dogmatically, not as real and certain, but only as relative and problematic. It was the best answer which they could give, yet one cannot wonder that it failed to give satisfaction to any but themselves. Whether their general assertion, however, was itself consistent or not, it was indispensable as a justification of their refusal either to affirm or deny the truth of any particular proposition as to the nature of things. And it was as indispensable to the Pyrrhonists as to themselves. These would-be thorough sceptics professed to be always seekers, on the ground that they never found. But why did they suppose that they never found? How did they think themselves always entitled to declare that truth, if it existed, had eluded them? Only because, in their opinion, there were no means of finding what was sought, no reliable organs or criteria by which to ascertain truth. But this was just the same assumption to which the sceptical Academicians gave expression. The neo-sceptics refrained from giving it expression, but they constantly implied and acted on it. They were less explicit than the Academicians, and therefore in appearance more consistent, but not more so in reality.

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Ænesidemus very considerably improved the theory of scepticism by classifying and describing the various ways in which what claims to be truth and certainty may be discredited and doubt superinduced. He was the first to arrange the arguments on behalf of scepticism under the heads known as *the ten tropes* (τρόποι). Although he originated none of them, he collected and grouped them, and thereby showed the strength of the case for scepticism more effectively than had previously been done. His arrangement of them cannot be justly praised as clear or natural, but even such as it was it marked an important advance.

The ten tropes corresponded to the grounds on which they were based, and these were the following: (1) the diversities of the organisation and constitution of the various kinds of animals; (2) the diversities of the organisation and constitution of human individuals; (3) the diversity of the senses even in the same individual; (4) the variableness of our physical and mental conditions and circumstances and their effects on our perceptions and judgments; (5) the influence of distance, place, and position on the appearance of objects; (6) the way in which our views of objects are affected by their connections with others; (7) the extent to which the characters of things are altered by changes of quantity and composition; (8) the relativity of all things to one another and to their percipient subjects; (9) the degree to which men's notions of phenomena are dependent on their frequency or rarity; and (10) the divergences of

## ÆNESIDEMUS AND CAUSALITY

moral and religious belief and practice, of customs, laws, rites, institutions, and opinions, among different peoples. These tropes show that Ænesidemus challenged the credibility of all our immediate perceptions and all our ordinary judgments, as well as of all the philosophical theories which rest on such perceptions and judgments.

His criticism of the notion of causation must not be forgotten; indeed, it was the most original and suggestive portion of his argumentation against the validity of human knowledge. By it he remarkably anticipated the views as to causality reached by Hume and Kant, while he yet strikingly differed from both. He denied to the belief in causality all objective legitimacy, and on at least two distinguishable grounds. First, the belief has no warrant in the notion of causality. The notion of a cause is a relative notion, the notion of a relation, a cause not being conceivable without that which it causes. But no relation can be shown to have any objective legitimacy, any existence except in thought. Thought relationships belong, or may belong, only to thought. Further, the notion of causality, according to Ænesidemus, is so inherently perplexing and inconsistent as to be unworthy of credence. It involves insuperable difficulties. A cause cannot be rationally thought of as either synchronous with, antecedent to, or consequent on its alleged effect. Not as synchronous with it, for then cause and effect would be so indistinguishable that each might as well be either cause or effect as the other; not as antecedent to it, for nothing can be the cause of anything until



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its effect exists ; not as consequent on it, for what produces cannot be subsequent to what is produced.

The point of view from which Ænesidemus criticised belief in causality seems to have been the Democritean or Heraclitean—one virtually materialistic. What his criticism showed was that the belief could not be justified from that standpoint. Hume, starting from the principles of sensationism taught by Locke, deduced from them scepticism on the strength of one having no perception of the connection of cause and effect in the external world. Kant professed to refute Hume by arguing that causality is a condition, and a necessary condition, of thought. What Ænesidemus contended was that as causality could not be shown to be other or more than thought, pure scepticism, Pyrrhonism, was justified. Obviously he would have regarded Kant's attempted answer to Hume as not a refutation but a confirmation of scepticism.

Of his immediate successors in the direction of the school the names merely are known. The only member of it recorded to have made any considerable change on its doctrine was Agrippa, as to the precise time of whose teaching there is much uncertainty. For the ten tropes of Ænesidemus he substituted five which were wider and deeper in their range, as well as more closely and logically connected, one naturally leading up and lending support to another from the first to the last. His first trope he described as resting on the contrariety of opinions the truth or falsity of which there are no satisfactory means of determin-

## SEXTUS EMPIRICUS

ing; the second, on the inevitable necessity of proving every proof *ad infinitum*; the third, on the relativity of all objects of sense and intelligence; the fourth, on the impossibility of carrying on any investigation or demonstration without making assumptions which themselves need to be established; and the fifth, the trope designated *ὁ διάλληλος*, on the endeavour to verify sense by reason and reason by sense—*i.e.*, by a circular or alternative process, which is fallacious, inasmuch as the truthfulness of both sense and reason is challenged by the sceptic. These were, according to Agrippa, the species or means of producing doubt best fitted to show that no one was entitled to deem himself certain of any truth, possessed of any indubitable knowledge.

Ancient scepticism had Sextus, surnamed Empiricus from adhering to the school or sect of physicians called Empirical, for its last literary representative and expositor. He was a Greek and flourished about A.D. 200. It is not known where he was born or where he taught. It has been conjectured that he lived for some time at Athens, at Alexandria, and at Rome. He wrote "Medical Memoirs," a treatise "On the Soul," and perhaps other works, which have been lost. The two works which have come down to us are the "Pyrrhonic Institutes," consisting of three books, and the treatise "Against the Dogmatists," which comprises eleven books. On them his fame will rest securely so long as the history of philosophy is a subject of human interest. All Greek scepticism, all that was most important in the most thorough

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and consistent development of agnosticism which has appeared in the world, seems to have been preserved in them, and would certainly have been in great part lost if they had not survived. They have had a very great influence even on modern thought and philosophy. The scepticism which prevailed in Europe from the beginning of the sixteenth to about the close of the eighteenth century drew its inspiration, its principles, and its methods largely from the writings of Sextus. Montaigne and Huet, Bayle and Hume, borrowed as freely from him as he himself had done from Arcesilaos and Carneades, Ænesidemus and Agrippa. Probably he originated no absolutely new agnostic idea or argument, but has transmitted to us only thoughts and reasonings which he derived to some extent from his Greek predecessors; probably also, however, there is scarcely any absolutely new agnostic idea or argument in all modern literature, scarcely any even which are not to be found indicated to some extent in the pages of Sextus.

Greco-Roman philosophical scepticism began its course in the latter half of the fourth century B.C., and became extinct about the commencement of the third century A.D. It does not appear to have been at any time widely accepted in the classical world, and certainly never enjoyed the popularity of such dogmatic systems as Epicureanism and Stoicism. Probably it was never much more prevalent than it was desirable it should be as a counteractive to philosophical dogmatism.

It dealt, of course, with religion and morality in

## GRECO-ROMAN SCEPTICISM

the same spirit and fashion as with all other things maintained to be objects of knowledge. But it was not specially antagonistic to them. Its adherents showed no predilection for attacking religion or morality; on the contrary, even when arguing that there was no real knowledge possible of divine things or moral distinctions, they professed to hold the common faith regarding them. Carneades keenly criticised religious beliefs and represented their grounds as non-rational or irrational, but he did not pretend that his own reasoning did more than show the unsatisfactoriness of the reasoning to which it was opposed. He ridiculed various aspects and portions of the popular religion, but he did not infer that it was not to be accepted. So Sextus professed his faith in the gods and providence even while he argued against its reasonableness.

The philosophical sceptics of Greece and Rome had little proselytising zeal. Professedly regarding individual imperturbability as the chief good, they did not aim at either destroying or reforming religion, and still less at revolutionising society, but were content to influence only cultured and ingenious minds. Those who attribute to them the ruin of religious faith in the ancient world take insufficient account of the fact that philosophical scepticism died out of that world and was succeeded by a great dogmatic reaction both in philosophy and religion. The centuries which immediately preceded the definitive triumph of Christianity were characterised not by excessive doubt but by excessive faith. In those centuries

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philosophical scepticism was extinct. It had worked out its own destruction, its endeavours to prove by reason that truth could not be found by reason having tended to make men seek it by other means,—faith, feeling, mystic vision, abnormal spiritual processes, tradition, authority, revelation. Hence it so far prepared the way for Neo-Platonism and Christianity, and inevitably disappeared before them.<sup>1</sup>

### IV. MIDDLE AGES

Between the disappearance of ancient and the rise of modern agnosticism there intervened a period of about fourteen hundred years, during which agnosticism had no distinct existence as a special and peculiar kind of philosophic thought. This is not equivalent to saying that it was wholly absent. That would not be a correct assertion. Agnostic elements may easily be detected in various medieval systems. An agnostic spirit was even very prevalent during the last two centuries of medieval history.

Several learned Christian agnostics of modern times have, in part perhaps to justify their own practice, represented the Christian Fathers generally as advocating the cause of the Gospel by arguments drawn from the Greek Pyrrhonists and Academi-

<sup>1</sup> The general accounts of Greek Scepticism in Zeller, Owen, Brochard (*Philosophie des Grecs*), and Credaro (*Lo Scetticismo degli Accademici*) are detailed and erudite. Hirzel's *Untersuchungen* and Natorp's *Forschungen* are indispensable to those who would enter on a thorough study of the subject. Reid's edition of Cicero's *Academics* is valuable. It is greatly to be regretted that there is no adequate edition of Sextus Empiricus.

## MEDIEVAL TIMES

cians. The evidence warrants no such view. It shows only that fervidness of temperament and dogmatic narrowness led some of the Fathers so to glory in faith and Scripture as to think and speak at times unworthily of reason and nature.

There was a kind of agnosticism which passed into the theology of the early and medieval Church, chiefly through the channel of Neo-Platonic philosophy. When Neo-Platonism taught that God was wholly unapproachable by reason; that He must be reached through faith, or ecstasy, or the self-surrender of individual consciousness; that He was so essentially one and so entirely indeterminate as to be without distinctions or attributes, without power, knowledge, love, justice, or excellence, in any sense intelligible by man; it was in one essential respect clearly agnostic, although in other respects conspicuously gnostic. But teaching of a like kind is to be found in the writings of St. Augustine and the Pseudo-Dionysius, and of John Scotus Erigena, Bonaventura, Eckhart, Nicolaus of Cusa, and others. The authors named inculcated in express terms the doctrine of "learned ignorance" (*docta ignorantia*), on which Hamilton and Mansel have laid so much stress, and, indeed, made the corner-stone of their agnosticism. They held that all positive knowledge of the Self-existent Being, the Unconditioned, is impossible, and that a thoughtful acquiescence in this fact, a carefully acquired conviction of inevitable nescience as regards ultimate reality, is the consummation of human science. Hence it may be maintained with a certain measure of truth



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that Greek agnosticism was rather absorbed into Christian thought than extinguished by it.

Among medieval thinkers the nominalists were the most sceptical and negative, and in the two last centuries of the medieval era there lived many nominalists. They started with empiricist preconceptions, and were disposed to deny that there could be any knowledge except of individual objects of sense. This sort of philosophising leads necessarily to some kind of agnosticism; in the Middle Ages it naturally led to a theological agnosticism. Nominalists like William of Occam and Peter D'Ailly may not inappropriately be described as theological agnostics, seeing that although they accepted the doctrines of the Church as articles of faith imposed by legitimate authority, they relegated theology to the sphere of the unprovable and unknowable. The nominalists generally so severed and opposed faith and reason that they could claim to be rigidly orthodox, while holding the human mind to be incapable of finding valid reasons for belief in the existence of God or in any other supersensuous verity. From this unnaturally divided root the doctrine of a twofold truth,—the doctrine that equally valid dicta of faith and reason may not only be distinct but contradictory,—that what is true in theology may be false in philosophy, and *vice versâ*,—was a very natural outgrowth. And the doctrine found acceptance. It had its strongholds in the Universities of Paris and of Pavia. In the thirteenth century ecclesiastical censures were pronounced against it, but it was, perhaps, more prevalent three centuries later.

## TRANSITION TO MODERN TIMES

There were many ready to say with Pomponazzi—"I believe as a Christian what I cannot believe as a philosopher."

To explain fully how agnosticism was suppressed to the extent that it was during fourteen hundred years, and yet how the suppression instead of being completely and permanently effective prepared the advent and influenced the development of a new era of a most powerful agnosticism, which still shows no signs of decadence, would require a philosophical survey of medieval history, showing how Christianity came to be accepted; how the Church became subject to a priestly hierarchy; how theology was shaped into system, and all science brought under its control; how society was organised by ecclesiastical authority; and then how a reaction of thought set in; how the general mind of Europe, influenced by various causes and circumstances, ceased to be satisfied with its condition, began to regard with a critical and even hostile disposition the powers which claimed lordship over it, and learned to cherish aspirations and hopes which had been previously unfelt or stifled or concealed. This, of course, cannot be here attempted, and so we pass at once to outline the history of Modern Agnosticism.

### V. FIRST PERIOD OF MODERN AGNOSTICISM. CAUSES AND CHARACTERISTICS

The history of Modern Agnosticism may be divided into two periods: the first extending from about the

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beginning of the sixteenth century to about the close of the fourth decade of the eighteenth century; the second comprehending the time from the commencement of Hume's philosophical career to the present day.

There were a variety of causes favourable to agnosticism operative throughout the first of these periods. The dominant and most comprehensive one was that just referred to—the general change in the European mind from submissiveness to authority and acquiescence in dogma to an independent and critical disposition of spirit. The struggles of the conflicting forces in the medieval world, the new experiences which the course of time had brought with it, a multitude of notable events, and even the efforts of scholasticism itself to extend its own sway and to promote by argument the cause of authority and faith, had all concurred in bringing about that profound and comprehensive change, and giving rise to the modern world, which, as contrasted with the medieval world, has for its distinctive characteristic the independent exercise of reason. Then special causes, which were, however, closely connected with the general cause, strongly favoured the diffusion of the agnostic spirit in the period indicated. Thus there was such a cause in the state into which philosophy lapsed when scholasticism broke up. It was a state of chaos in which all the ancient systems and a multitude of new ones, hastily extemporised, struggled with each other, and sought in vain for general recognition. It would have been strange if scepticism had not been among

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them. The strife occasioned by differences of opinion as to religion was probably an even more powerful cause of scepticism than the struggle of philosophies. Its violence and unscrupulousness, and the wicked deeds and horrible wars which it produced, directly tended to discredit both religion and human nature, and to make men disbelieve in truth and morality. The combination of intellectual culture and of moral and religious corruption, widely prevalent in the epoch of transition from medieval to modern times, worked in the same direction. Further, the special sciences and professional studies were in a condition much more fitted to foster and confirm than to restrain and correct the sceptical spirit. The conjectural and the false in them largely predominated over the certain and the true. To be led to consider them with a critical mind was to be subjected to the temptation to regard all science as vanity and delusion.

Scepticism even in the form which may be called agnosticism was, accordingly, prevalent in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But it was, of course, considerably different from the agnosticism of Hume and Kant, and of our contemporaries. It had its own characteristics, derived from the causes which originated it and the circumstances in which it appeared.

One of these characteristics was imperfect development. It did not rest on any searching or comprehensive criticism of the powers of the human intellect. It did not attain in the writings of any of its representatives a properly philosophical character. It was

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mainly the expression of an exaggerated depreciation of knowledge or of a despair of acquiring knowledge, due to the real or imagined detection of the uncertainty of what passed for science and of the aberrations of what was called reason at the time in which it prevailed. It moralised and preached; satirised, jested, and declaimed; cultivated *belles lettres* and availed itself of the resources of erudition favourable to its ends; but it shunned the arduous labours of real philosophising, and neglected exact analyses, severe argumentation, logical precision, and verbal accuracy. It was a superficial, popular philosophy; not a solidly founded or carefully built up speculative system.

Another characteristic of the first phase of modern agnosticism was absence of essential originality. It was in the main a revival of Greek agnosticism. Its weapons of warfare were drawn almost entirely from the arsenals of ancient scepticism, and especially from the works of Sextus. The only originality of its champions lay in their mode of handling those weapons. Even in the scepticism of Montaigne there is nothing new but the manner of expression, the fresh literary style. The sort of want of originality indicated is no reason for depreciating the authors referred to or undervaluing their services, seeing that it was not only compatible with but favourable to originality as regards the expression of their views. Each of them was remarkably successful in presenting a scepticism essentially common to all with a naturalness and individuality of form which contributed

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greatly to its attractiveness and diffusion. It was no ordinary service which they rendered to the world when they resuscitated, revived, and popularised the agnosticism of antiquity among their contemporaries, and so transmitted it to future generations. But for their comparatively unoriginal and superficial scepticism we should probably have had neither the more original and profound scepticism nor the more original and profound positive speculation of later ages.

A third characteristic of the agnosticism of the transition period is that it was predominantly religious in aim, and, at least, more reverent towards religion than towards science. It was generally represented by its advocates as the best defence of religion. Only in the sixteenth century did attempts to support religion by philosophical scepticism begin to be made; only in the seventeenth century did they become common. The ancient sceptics were more consistent than to make such attempts. Their scepticism was all of a piece, so to speak. They saw that if it could be shown that men have no knowledge of objects, it followed that they can have no knowledge of religious objects; that the general includes the particular. Some of the early Christian Fathers were led by their zeal against pagan philosophy to harsh censure of philosophy itself, and to occasional denials of the authority of reason; but none of them sought to raise scepticism to the rank of a method of producing believers. Of course, the scholastic divines felt no need of such a method. It was only when reason began to



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take up an attitude of opposition to religion, and when it began, at least, within the sphere of religion to criticise independently and unfavourably the dogmas of the Church, that there was evoked an antagonistic spirit, —a desire to humiliate and discredit reason in order thereby to exalt and glorify faith.

### VI. REPRESENTATIVE AGNOSTICS OF THE TRANSITION PERIOD

The first representative of modern agnosticism was Henry Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim (1486-1535). His career was of the most diversified and romantic character. He lived in many lands, acquired many languages, studied all kinds of subjects, and passed through the most varied experiences. As early as the twentieth year of his age he was striving to fathom the secrets of theosophy, alchemy, astrology, and magic, and interesting himself in the foundation of Rosicrucian societies. He was a conspirator in Spain, a soldier in Italy, a courtier in Austria, an ambassador in England, a physician in Switzerland, a theologian at Dole in Burgundy, an advocate at Metz, and served in other capacities in other places. He was knighted on the battlefield; he was a Doctor of Laws, a Doctor of Medicine, and a Doctor of Divinity; and, in popular reputation, a most powerful sorcerer and magician. An adventurer he unquestionably was, but not an unprincipled one. Although impetuous and imprudent, and sometimes driven into false positions, he was essentially honest, chivalrous,

## AGRIPPA OF NETTESHEIM

and even, notwithstanding his wars with sword and pen, refined and gentle. While he saw clearly the errors of the Church of Rome and condemned them with a boldness which roused against him the wrath of its clergy and monks, and involved him in much suffering, he refused, like Dean Colet, Sir Thomas More, and many other learned and good men of his time, to take part in the disruption of the visible unity of Christendom.

His two chief works present him to us in very different aspects. In the treatise *On Occult Philosophy* (written in 1509, and, after being widely circulated in MS., printed in a revised form at Antwerp in 1531), we see him in his eager, credulous, enthusiastic early manhood, a theosophic mystic, a confident believer in the existence and cognoscibility of magical and marvellous secret powers pervading nature, a man much too ready to accept as science all that claimed to be science. In the work on account of which he is mentioned here, *A Declamation on the Uncertainty and Vanity of the Arts and Sciences* (written in 1526 and published in 1530), we see the same man, but that man disillusioned, and who has gone, as men of his temperament not infrequently do, to the contrary extreme.

The work makes no pretensions to impartiality: it is avowedly a satire, "a cynical declamation." Yet, in the main, it is quite serious and sincere. Its author knew the sciences and arts of his age as scarcely any one else did; but he had come to the conclusion that men enormously overestimated the worth of

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them, and felt, in particular, how much he had been himself deceived in regard to them. Hence he now assails them with as much fervour as he had formerly lauded them. Surveying them one after another in a long succession of chapters, he gives prominence to what is weak and uncertain, useless or hurtful, in all human studies and professions, and argues that it is dangerous to trust them, foolish to be proud of them; that all is dubious except God's Word, and that its truth is accessible to all men by faith in Jesus Christ and the enlightening grace of the Holy Spirit.

The scepticism of Agrippa was not a reasoned-out theory or even a definitive intellectual conviction, but a frame of mind, and indeed largely of feeling, of the exaggeration in which he was himself so far conscious, produced by his having so often found what was called science to be conjecture or absurdity and the professions esteemed most honourable to be pervaded with deceit and charlatanry. The one thing to which his scepticism did not extend, the one thing in which he felt there was no illusion or falsity, was God's Word received in its plain and simple meaning as revealed in the Gospel.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The late Professor Henry Morley's *Life of Henry Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, Doctor and Knight, commonly known as a Magician*, 2 vols., 1856, is an admirable biography and study,—the first work in which full justice was done to Agrippa, although Naudé, Moreri, and Bayle had to some extent shown that he had been greatly calumniated. M. Auguste Prost's *Corneille Agrippa, sa vie et ses œuvres*, 2 vols., 1881-82, is not nearly so vivid and artistic, but he has pushed research further and added considerably to our knowledge of the events and circumstances of Agrippa's career. Owen treats of Agrippa's agnosticism very fully, but, in my opinion, considerably exaggerates it.

## MONTAIGNE

Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) did much more to diffuse scepticism. His *Essais* (1580), owing to qualities on which hundreds of critics and admirers have descanted but on which no word need here be said, have enjoyed immense popularity and exercised immense influence. Scepticism has never appeared in a more generally attractive form: and all ancient scepticism is there,—transmitted, revived, and modernised in passing through the mind of Montaigne into the book which he so truly tells us “is himself.”

No writer in the whole history of literature, so far as I know, has portrayed his own character with more candour, fulness, and skill than Montaigne has done in his *Essais*. That character was obviously one constitutionally favourable to the reception of the agnostic spirit,—one to which “not less than knowledge doubt was grateful.” Montaigne loved dearly his own ease and comfort; disliked all constraint; was keenly alive to the hatefulness of intolerance and persecution; was quick to see reasons both for belief and disbelief in all opinions; and, although very fond of reasoning for the sake of the pleasure of the exercise, was too impatient and unsteady to seek truth in a persistent and methodical manner. The almost exclusively classical and humanist education which he received tended to foster his sceptical proclivities. It made him more in sympathy with the pagan than the Christian spirit, and failed to initiate him into any real acquaintance with science. He knew many things, but few well. The one subject which he care-

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fully studied, his own self-contradictory and changeful nature, was not suggestive of aught permanent or stable. Further, the character of the period in which he lived must have contributed to evoke and confirm his scepticism. It was not only the time when the conflict between the ruling ideas of scholasticism and the beliefs distinctive of the renaissance was at its height, but also one of the most deplorable epochs of French history: an age of ethical and spiritual as well as of intellectual disintegration, of lax morality, of religious hypocrisy and religious fanaticism, of political unscrupulousness and of continuous and ferocious civil war, in which Romanists and Huguenots, Leaguers and Lutherans, alike sought to cloak the most abominable crimes with professions of piety and of patriotism. It is easy to understand how in such evil days a clear-sighted and peace-loving man like Montaigne should have come to form a low estimate of human nature, and to have the most serious doubts of the attainability of truth.

The scepticism of Montaigne was of an indulgent, half-pitying, half-contemptuous kind. No man could be more tolerant towards all sorts of opinions and actions: their diversity and strangeness were an un-failing source of interest and amusement to him. The contradictions and absurdities of the learned afforded him his favourite argument for representing so-called science as a failure, and the human mind as singularly unreasonable in its reasonings. For his own part, he did not profess to philosophise or even to be consistent; did not put forth his opinions "as

## ITS GRECO-ROMAN SOURCE

true but as his" ; and did not formally inculcate scepticism, but so treated, in his own easy and natural, free and familiar way, whatever themes happened to occur to him, as to make them all suggest the vanity of anxious search for truth, and minister to the spirit of doubt.

The manner in which he presented his scepticism was entirely his own and inimitable; the scepticism itself he derived from Greco-Roman sources. There was no distinct originality in his point of view or absolute novelty in his arguments. On the other hand, there was very little, if anything, of a sceptical nature and tendency which the ancient sceptics are known to have urged that he did not recall and make use of in his own peculiarly fascinating way.

His scepticism must be credited with thoroughness. He preferred the Pyrrhonian attitude towards truth, knowledge, and certitude to the Academic. He saw the inconsistency of at once denying those things, and yet admitting, as the Academicians did, "a certain partiality of judgment," "an appearance of likelihood," in any direction or instance. "What is such an apparent inclination but a recognition of some more apparent truth in this than in that?" . . . "Why do they (the Academicians) suffer themselves to incline and be swayed by verisimilitude, if they know not the truth?" The symbol or emblem of his scepticism was a balance perfectly poised as regards truth and falsehood, knowledge and nescience, and therefore liable to be swayed or turned either way as regards belief, feeling, or action by any non-rational



## HISTORY OF AGNOSTICISM

influence, however strange or slight. His motto was not *Je ne sais pas*, but *Que sais-je?*

Being radical, his scepticism was also naturally universal. The notion that it extended only to metaphysical things or questions, and so was merely a sort of Positivism, has found defenders, but is wholly erroneous. Montaigne troubled himself very little about metaphysical disputes. His doubts were brought to bear on all the apprehensions of sense and all the applications of reason; they spared nothing in morals and religion. He acknowledged, indeed, that we cannot help assenting to certain perceptions or appearances of sense; but he none the less on that account held that the senses alter and falsify everything that they bring us. Nay, even from our entire dependence on them he inferred our entire ignorance not only of their own objects but of the objects of all our other faculties, these being all derived from sense. What are commonly regarded as virtues and as laws of conscience and principles and verities of religion, he regarded as products of custom and other causes wholly independent of truth and knowledge.

Yet although his scepticism undoubtedly extended to morality and religion, he did not seek by diffusing it to spread immorality or irreligion, or even moral or religious indifferentism. He wished to make life better and happier, and recognised a Divine excellency in Christianity. He deemed it right to reserve for faith a sphere exempt from the intrusive interrogations of reason. He acknowledged the need of supernatural grace to convey Divine truth to the mind

and heart of man, and "the need of a Divine basis and foundation on which those who rest will not be shaken as others are by human accidents, the love of novelty, the constraint of princes, the fortunes of parties, the rash and fortuitous changes of opinions, the subtleties of argument, or the attractions of rhetoric." <sup>1</sup>

Montaigne had in the later years of his life an intimate friend and admiring disciple in Peter Charron (1541-1603), a Roman Catholic theologian and celebrated preacher. This divine published in 1593 a work of religious apologetics, *Les Trois Vérités*, in which he defended Theism against atheists, Christianity against idolaters, Jews, and Moḥammedans, and Catholicism against Protestants, and sought to establish these three positions: 1st, There is one God whom alone we ought to worship; 2nd, Of all religions the Christian is the only credible one; and 3rd, Of all Christian communions the Roman is the only safe one. The orthodoxy of this work passed unchallenged, although its spirit and the method of reasoning pursued in it were of a decidedly agnostic character. It was not otherwise with the *Discours*

<sup>1</sup> The following are among the English writing regarding Montaigne most worth consulting: (1) Bayle St. John's *Montaigne the Essayist*, 2 vols., 1857; (2) Dean Church's Article in the *Oxford Essays*, 1859; (3) Collins's *Montaigne* (Blackwoods' Foreign Classics), 1889; and (4) Owen's *Skeptics of the French Renaissance*, ch. i., 1893. Brunetière (*Manuel de l'histoire de la littérature française*, pp. 86, 87) gives a judiciously selected list of French writings. Two German authors, H. Thimme (1875) and A. Hemming (1879), have published dissertations with the title *Der Skepticismus Montaignes*.

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*Chrétien*s, published in 1600. But the *De la Sagesse*, which appeared in the following year and revealed the scepticism of its author in a fully developed form, evoked a great storm of wrathful controversy. And from his own day until now many have supposed that the same man could not have honestly preached the "Christian Discourses," and believed what he wrote in "The Three Truths," and yet entertained the sceptical views set forth in the "Treatise on Wisdom." But that merely shows that those who have thought so have not understood the character of his scepticism: a scepticism not less sceptical of itself than of other things; a scepticism founded on distrust of reason, yet anxious to draw from the admission of the weakness and worthlessness of reason some advantage to the cause of religion and virtue and social peace.

The scepticism of Charron was substantially the same as that of Montaigne, but he expounded it in a graver and more systematic form. As Montaigne can no more be justly credited with any essential originality of thought than Charron, and the style and method of the two men are most unlike, it seems unfair to represent, as is often done, the latter as a mere disciple and copyist of the former.

According to Charron, science is unattainable: truth is hid in the bosom of God, and cannot be reached by the natural faculties of men. Education and custom mainly determine what our religion will be. Wisdom—that practical acquaintance with one's own spirit, its limits, weaknesses, and obligations, which displays itself in honouring and serving God,

governing the desires and appetites, conducting oneself moderately and equally in prosperity and adversity, obeying the laws, customs, and ceremonies of one's country, trying to do good to others, acting prudently in business, being prepared for death, and maintaining peace in one's own heart and conscience—is what we may hope for and should strive for. Laborious efforts to attain science and passionate contentions about religion are alike vain. Reason is one of the feeblest of instruments and the sphere of certainty is of the narrowest range.

Charron treats of virtue in a much warmer and worthier tone than Montaigne. He places it above everything else, and ascribes to it absolute dignity and unconditioned value in words which remind us of what Kant has said of the moral law. But this is not to be regarded as a limitation of his scepticism, understood as equivalent to agnosticism: it is a declaration of his faith, not an admission or profession of his knowledge, and therefore quite compatible with agnosticism.<sup>1</sup>

Francis Sanchez (1552-1632) was uninfluenced by either Montaigne or Charron. He was of Judeo-Portuguese origin, but spent the greater part of his life in France, and chiefly at Toulouse, where he taught philosophy and also laboured both as a medical professor and practitioner. His writings are all in Latin, and deal mostly with anatomical and medical

<sup>1</sup> See on Charron (as also on Montaigne) D. Stewart in his *Dissertation* (Collected Works, vol. i. pp. 98-107); Owen, *Sk. F. R.*, ch. iii.; Ste. Beuve, *Causeries du Lundi*, vol. xi.; and Vinet, *Moralistes français au xvi<sup>e</sup> siècle*.

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subjects. The work on account of which he has been ranked among sceptics, *A Treatise on the Noble and First Universal Science that Nothing is Known*, although not published until 1581, had been in manuscript since 1576, four years previous to the appearance of Montaigne's *Essais*. In it he criticises very courageously and, on the whole, very justly, the science and logic of his age, dwelling especially on the inadequacy of syllogistic rules and processes to the requirements of research; on the fallacious substitution of words for things and of abstractions for facts; on the folly of inventing imaginary entities and having recourse to occult qualities for the explanation of experiences instead of directly, patiently, and methodically studying them; on the worthlessness of verbal definitions and mere erudition; and on the pernicious consequences of a servile dependence on authority. All that, however, shows not scepticism but good sense and the intellectual clearness of a naturally scientific mind. And I am not prepared to maintain that Sanchez can be fairly classed among philosophical sceptics. Yet there is, perhaps, no sceptic of the sixteenth or seventeenth century whose language has a more agnostic sound than his in many passages. But all his seemingly agnostic utterances may be found on examination to mean comparatively little, and what would be quite harmless did it not suggest to the unwary reader more than it really means. They can all be referred to one and the same cause—a most unfortunate and indefensible definition of “knowledge” (*scientia*). He chooses to mean by it *rei perfecta*

## HIS RELIGIOUS FAITH

*cognitio*, the complete comprehension of a thing both in itself and in all its relationships. Of course, with such a conception of knowledge he could not fail to reach the conclusion *quod nihil scitur*, and might have reached it by a single step instead of by the lengthened course which he actually followed—that of showing the various respects in which human cognition, as regards alike its object, subject, and nature, falls short of perfection. But who pretends to have “a perfect cognition,” an absolute comprehension, of anything? No one. Only an infinite intelligence can have knowledge in that sense even of the least of things. Hence the question as to whether or not Sanchez was an agnostic can only be settled by ascertaining whether or not he denied the attainability of knowledge in the sense in which other people affirm its attainability. It seems to me that he did not. He certainly speaks of a *scientia*, and even of a *scientia firma*, very different from the *scientia* of his definition; of a *scientia quantum possumus*, a *scientia quantum fragilitas humana patitur*; and announced his intention to follow up the *Quod Nihil Scitur* by another tractate showing how such knowledge or science may be attained. He has also informed us that he meant his method to begin from the perceptions of sense, the primary data of all knowledge, and to proceed experimentally and critically (*per experimentum et per iudicium liberum, non irrationabile tamen*). The book promised unfortunately never appeared; but, notwithstanding that, we seem entitled to consider his so-called scepticism as only the initial and pre-



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paratory stage of his philosophy, and himself not as an agnostic but as an eminent precursor of Bacon and Descartes. He was a devout Roman Catholic. There is no evidence that his religious faith rested on sceptical foundations.<sup>1</sup>

La Mothe Le Vayer (1588-1672), a facile and entertaining writer, highly reputed in his own age as a scholar, and influential both at Court and in the Academy, was a typical specimen of the seventeenth-century sceptic. A considerable number of the compositions contained in the collected edition of his *Œuvres* are illustrative of his agnostic mode of thought and reasoning, but the *Cinq Dialogues faits à l'imitation des anciens par Horatius Tubero* (1671) is the most famous and interesting of them in this reference. Le Vayer was thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the old Greek Pyrrhonians and Academicians, and constantly used their arguments. Sextus was "his dear patron and venerable master," the *Hypotyposes* "a golden book, an inestimable and Divine writing," and the *ten tropes* "his decalogue." His motto was the two lines of Spanish verse—

"De las cosas mas seguras  
La mas segura es dudar."

"Of things most sure the surest is doubt."

He had a great predilection for what has been called *the geographical argument* for scepticism. Indeed it was chiefly by dwelling on the different opin-

<sup>1</sup> See Owen, *Sk. F. R.*, ch. iv. ; and L. Gerkrath, *Franz Sanchez*, &c., Wien, 1860.

## LE VAYER AND GLANVILLE

ions and customs prevalent in different lands and ages that he attempted to produce the impression that there was nothing fixed and certain in physics, in logic, in matters of taste, in moral and religious practice, &c. Yet, although nothing has been more varied and conflicting in its forms than religion, he repeatedly declared that he did not question or doubt the religion founded on revelation, and that scepticism was favourable to true religion. He held himself to be a Christian sceptic, and described Saint Paul as another; but religion, and even morality, were not conspicuous either in his character or writings.<sup>1</sup>

The worthy English divine Joseph Glanville (1636-1680), author of *Scepsis Scientifica* and other works, ought not, I think, to be included among sceptics. He was the enemy of confident dogmatism both in philosophy and in theology: he was the advocate of experimental investigation in the former and of the moderate doctrines of "the latitude men" in the latter. But in neither was he properly speaking sceptical. What is called his scepticism is little more than an emphatic dwelling on the uncertainties of what passed among his contemporaries for science. A mere enunciation of the view of causality so effectively employed by Hume in the interests of scepticism is no evidence of the scepticism of one who made no sceptical application of it.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> As regards Le Vayer see Owen (*Sk. F. R.*, ch. v.), and L. Etienne, *Essai sur la Mothe Le Vayer*, 1840.

<sup>2</sup> There is a fine and just estimate of Glanville's character and position as a thinker in Tulloch's *Rational Theology*, vol. ii. pp. 443-452. See also Owen's *Introductory Essay* to his edition of

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Theological agnosticism, however, was advocated with passionate zeal by a contemporary of Glanville, Jerome Hirnhaim (1637-1679), a dignitary of the Roman Catholic Church in Bohemia. His *De Typho Generis Humani* (1676) is one of the most violent and extreme attacks on secular science and natural reason. The validity even of the principles of causality, identity, and contradiction is denied in it. All human knowledge is assumed to rest on the testimony of the senses, and that testimony is maintained to be proved untrustworthy by experience and the evidence of faith. The dogma of creation discredits the maxim *ex nihilo nihil fit*. The Incarnation shows that the belief that God cannot be contained in a body is untrue. Transubstantiation disproves the principle that there is no accident without a substance. The Word of God, the revelation confided to the care of the Church, is alone certain; and the duty of man is to accept it with entire and unquestioning faith. Worldly wisdom and science are error and vanity, and ought to be sacrificed to theology, Divine science. So Hirnhaim taught,—and taught, there can be no doubt, in all sincerity and with excellent intentions. Hirnhaim reminds us in various respects of Lamennais and his *De Typho Generis Humani* of the latter's *Essai sur l'Indifférence en matière de religion*.<sup>1</sup>

Glanville's *Scepsis Scientifica*, Kegan Paul, 1885. Dr. Ferris Greenslet's *Joseph Glanville* (New York, 1900) is a comprehensive and careful study, issued by the Columbia University, and published by the Macmillan Company.

<sup>1</sup> C. S. Barach, *Hieronymus Hirnhaim*, Wien, 1864. Hirnhaim's book had great influence in Bohemia.

Daniel Peter Huet (1630-1721), Bishop of Avranches, was a much more widely famed representative of the same school of theological thought. He was a man of versatile genius and vast erudition, and the author of numerous works once celebrated and still occasionally consulted. His *Demonstratio Evangelica*, 1679, and his *Alnetanæ Qæstiones de Concordia Rationis et Fidei*, 1690, gave him a high reputation among theologians, notwithstanding the agnostic assumptions and conclusions to be found in them. In his *Traité de la faiblesse de l'esprit humain*, published posthumously in 1723, a completely Pyrrhonistic system is set forth and advocated in the interests of religion. In opposition to the methodical doubt of Descartes he contends for unlimited doubt of natural reason. He represents the writers of the Bible and the Fathers of the Church as cherishing and inculcating such doubt. By appealing to sundry words of Scripture, and by dwelling on the deceptions which proceed from defects in the senses and intellectual powers, from the changes in things, the diversities in men, the want of a certain criterion of truth, the fallacies in reasoning, the dissensions of dogmatists, &c., he endeavoured to prove that the human understanding is incapable of attaining to certainty by the exercise of its natural faculties. Probability sufficient to direct us in the common affairs of life is, he holds, all that reason can give us. As respects matters of philosophy those who affirm nothing are alone worthy to be esteemed philosophers. The "art of doubting" should be cultivated in order to pre-

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pare the mind to receive the faith. Certainty can only be obtained through recourse to revelation and grace for enlightenment and support. The best foundation for Catholic theology is Pyrrhonic philosophy. Thus Huet taught.<sup>1</sup>

Was the illustrious Pascal (1623-62)—the immortal author of the *Lettres Provinciales* and of the *Pensées*—also a religious sceptic? The question has been repeatedly and elaborately discussed, and much unwillingness has been shown to answer it in the affirmative. It seems to me that it is thus that it must be answered; and, indeed, that Pascal is the most striking example in history of a man Christian to the core and yet thoroughly agnostic in his estimate of natural reason. Certainly he made extraordinary concessions to the most absolute scepticism and bestowed on it extravagant praise. He declared Pyrrhonism “the truth,” Pyrrho “the only sage before Christ,” and that “to mock at philosophy is truly to philosophise”; and although he affirmed the impossibility of universal doubt he said nothing against its reasonableness, and so was merely sceptical even of his own scepticism. In dwelling on the doctrine of the Fall and its effects, on the weaknesses and inconsistencies of man, on the variations of morality and kindred topics, he forgot measure and proportion. In opposing the head to the heart, understanding to faith, nature to grace, he made sheer and violent contrasts of

<sup>1</sup> See M. Pattison's *Essays*, vol. i.; Jourdain's art. *Huet* in Franck's *Dict. d. Sc. ph.*; and especially C. Bartholmess, *Huet ou le Scepticisme théologique*, 1850.

## PASCAL AND BAYLE

what ought to be closely conjoined. Holding that so far as reason is concerned there are equal grounds for believing and disbelieving in the existence of God, the reality of moral distinctions, and the truth of Christianity, he was reduced to urge that men should act as if they believed in them, and as a means of believing in them, on the same ground that a gambler when the chances are visibly or demonstrably equal bets on the side on which his interests lie; in other words, that they should wager on the side of God, virtue, and the Gospel, because if the result proves them to have been correct their gain will be immense, whereas if it should turn out that they have been mistaken their loss will be insignificant. An apologetic of Christianity rested on such principles as those indicated may well be deemed unsatisfactory. It does not follow that Pascal performed no great service as a Christian apologist. In reality, he rendered by the way in which he applied in the *Pensées* the psychological or experimental method, the method of spiritual verification to the probation of the Christian faith, an inestimable service—one which fully justifies his being regarded as one of the most original and profound of Christian apologists.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the most influential of the sceptics of the seventeenth century was Peter Bayle (1647-1706),

<sup>1</sup> For the affirmative view as to Pascal's Scepticism see Cousin (*Études sur Pascal*), Saisset (*Le Scepticisme*), and Owen (*Sketpcis*, &c., ch. vi.); and for the negative view Vinet (*Études sur Pascal*) and Droz (*Étude sur le Scepticisme de Pascal*). See also Tulloch's *Pascal*, 1878, and Prof. Grote's *Pascal and Montaigne*, "Cont. Rev.," vol. xxx, July, 1877.



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so widely known by his *Historical and Critical Dictionary*. The relations between his scepticism and the peculiarities of his character, the tendencies and controversies of his age, and his personal experiences are both interesting and easily traceable, but must be left by us unindicated. He had an insatiable and indiscriminate curiosity regarding facts and opinions, wonderful logical dexterity, extreme ingenuity in inventing and great fondness for maintaining paradoxes, only feeble cravings either for fixed principles or for unity and harmony in his speculations, a painful want of moral delicacy, and no depth of religious emotion. His strongest passion was the love of toleration. While intellectually honest he so keenly enjoyed discussion for its own sake as to care too little whether it led to truth or not. He himself called his scepticism "historical Pyrrhonism." It is commonly known as "erudite scepticism." The secret of it consists in so exhibiting the arguments for and against all opinions as to leave the mind puzzled and perplexed, and with neither power nor desire to form a decision.

The scepticism of Bayle was directed even more against theological than against philosophical dogmas. This is a noteworthy characteristic of it. Scepticism is seen in the writings of Bayle assuming that especially anti-religious attitude so generally taken by it in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Bayle sought, however, partially to conceal the anti-religious nature of his scepticism by arguing that faith and reason are contradictory, and therefore it

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does not follow that the dogmas of faith are not to be believed even when proved irrational. Even in that case they may have as much right to acceptance as the conclusions of reason. Thus, on the plea of the harmlessness of his procedure, Bayle kept constantly evolving the absurdities which he supposed to be implied in the doctrines of religion. He thereby brought the first stage of the movement of modern agnosticism to a natural close. By completing it he abolished it. By generalising its arguments he made evident the futility of its pretensions. Without professing to do anything of the kind, he really and effectively showed how delusive was the notion that religion could reasonably hope to find a friend in scepticism; how mistaken was the policy of an alliance of religion with the sense of doubt or nescience.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See D. Stewart's *Dissertation*, pp. 313-324; A. Deschamps' *Genèse du Scepticisme érudit chez Bayle*; and the articles of M. Pillon in the *Année philosophique*, 1895, 1896, and 1897.

## CHAPTER IV

### AGNOSTICISM OF HUME AND KANT

#### I. HUME: PREFATORY AS TO HIS AGNOSTICISM

THE agnosticism of the present day flows directly from Hume and Kant as its two great fountain-heads. Of the two Kant was the greater philosopher but the lesser agnostic. He surpassed Hume in comprehensiveness, constructiveness, inventiveness, and other qualities, but he did not equal him in critical acuteness and clearness; and, one single feature excepted, his whole agnosticism may be found more sharply and finely delineated in the writings of his predecessor. Hume is, undoubtedly, one of those "dead but sceptred sovereigns" who still rule our spirits from their urns"; probably he is of all the eminent Scotchmen of the eighteenth century the one who has most affected the general course and character of British and European thought. The influence of Adam Smith, as the author of the *Wealth of Nations*, has been more definite and visible, but also narrower and not so deep. Carlyle hardly exaggerates when he speaks of him as "the true intellectual king of the eighteenth century"; at least if the description be understood to refer not so much to his direct personal sway, to what he achieved himself or to the number

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of adherents and disciples he gained, but to his indirect influence, to what he stimulated or compelled others to do, what he brought to an end and caused to be begun.

And his influence, viewed as a whole, may reasonably be held to have been decidedly for good. Incidental and immediate evils of a kind it no doubt had. If the shaking of an unquestioning faith be essentially evil, his whole mode of theorising must have been evil. But if such shaking be far more a good than an evil, any evil Hume did must have been slight compared with the eventual good which he brought about. It is manifest that the latter supposition is the true one, and the one which facts have confirmed. It was absolutely necessary that the questions which he raised as to the grounds or bases both of knowledge and of religion should be put, and that in the unimpassioned and searching way in which he put them. It was an essential condition of the new departure which was needed both in philosophy and in theology that the doubts which he suggested as to the very foundations of both should be propounded, and that by a powerful and constitutionally sceptical intellect. The time called for the man; the man was exactly suited to meet a want of the time. The sceptic and the dogmatist are alike the instruments of providence.

Authors like Huxley in England, Riehl in Germany, and Compayré in France have given us expositions of Hume's philosophy in which they have ignored this aspect of it, or rather this the very essence

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of it; have actually been unable to see any scepticism at all in the theorisings of Hume. How happens it that men so able have given us such a misrepresentation, or at least one-sided representation of his doctrine? Partly, must be the answer, because Hume really was a pioneer of experimental science, in which capacity Huxley admirably delineates him; a precursor of the Critical Philosophy, as Riehl maintains; and to a large extent a positivist, as shown by Compayré. Experimentalism, epistemological criticism, and positivism neither exclude one another nor agnosticism, and they all coexisted with agnosticism in the mind of Hume, and coexist with it in his writings. It was thus rendered possible to study Hume so one-sidedly as to overlook his scepticism. But the main reason why the writers referred to have actually so erred is that they have substantially adopted his philosophical principles without seeing the full bearing of them as regards the validity of knowledge and the sufficiency of science. Because they have not seen how deep in their reach and wide in their range the sceptical consequences of his principles were, they have supposed that he had not seen it. That is a huge mistake on their part. It is a historical fact that he did see it, and logically certain that in so seeing he saw truly.

The agnosticism of Hume was of the very essence of his philosophy, and his philosophy was the natural outcome of a kind of philosophy which preceded it. His agnosticism, in other words, had for its basis modern philosophy so far as modern philosophy had

## HUME'S PREDECESSORS

been agnostic in tendency. In that lay to a great extent the significance and importance of it. It was not merely the scepticism of an individual thinker: it was a scepticism which had been present and operative in the speculations of some generations of thinkers, although it had not previously shown itself in its full force and in the light of open day. Hume evolved and gave admirable expression to the scepticism latent in the empirical or sensationist philosophy which, gradually acquiring strength from the days of Lord Bacon downwards, was to become for a time the ruling power in all departments of thought and life.

The philosophers to whom he owed most were the ancient sceptics, and Bacon, Locke, and Berkeley. Like draws to like; and there is abundance of evidence, although Hume seldom makes quotations, that at an early period of his philosophical studies he had made himself well acquainted—either at first or second hand—with the arguments and topics of the sceptical schools of the ancient world. The *Academica*, *De Natura Deorum*, *Disputationes Tusculanæ*, &c., of Cicero, his favourite prose classic, may safely be held to have, from the first awakening of literary ambition within him, influenced his mode of thought as well as his style of expression. His method of investigation was sincerely meant to be experimental and Baconian, whether or not it was really so. Locke made him a psychologist. His theory of knowledge was a simplification of that of Locke: in a multitude of instances he reaped what Locke had sown. From



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Berkeley he derived his views of abstraction, of the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, of the hypothetical character of substance, &c. The scepticism which Berkeley had applied to the outer world of matter Hume supplemented and completed by applying a like scepticism to the inner world of mind. With the spirit of religious doubt so prevalent in the contemporary literature and society of France he was intimately in sympathy.

When first propounded the most distinctive feature of his agnosticism was its claim to be wholly founded on experimental psychology. It was the character of its connection with psychology—inductive mental science—which gave it its originality, its influence, and such worth as it possessed. Had the psychology with which it was associated been as true as its connection therewith was firm and natural, agnosticism would have achieved a decisive victory. This, however, was not the case; and, accordingly, instead of Hume's psychology proving his agnosticism, his agnosticism became the *reductio ad absurdum* of his psychology, and of all psychology of the same kind,—every merely sensationist psychology. We are not to suppose that he himself desired or meant it to be so. He is not to be thought of as starting with a conviction of the insufficiency of the principles he adopted, and then labouring to make their insufficiency apparent by exhibiting the consequences to which they led. He accepted his principles in perfect good faith, seeing no others which seemed to him so good. When he began to form a system they were those generally

## HUME'S THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

accepted, and the only ones on which he thought he could found it. After he had constructed it, and seen all that he could make of them, he remained unable to detect where they were at fault, and certainly unprepared to abandon them, although he made no attempts to defend them, and was very indulgent towards those who attacked them. What was the extent of his faith in them is never likely to be determined, but the kind or quality of it was obviously very appropriate to an agnostic. His merit was that, having adopted the principles of a merely empirical philosophy, he tried with rare skill and perfect dispassionateness to bring out of them all that was in them, and only what was in them; saw what that was with a clearness which has never been surpassed; and did not attempt to conceal either from himself or others what it was—namely, not a satisfactory explanation of the world or a satisfactory foundation of science or conduct, but an indication that knowledge is unattainable, the world an inexplicable enigma, and the state of man whimsically absurd.

The theory of knowledge adopted by Hume was, as I have said, a simplification of that of Locke. According to both Locke and Hume, all our knowledge is derived from experience, and experience consists of particular states of mind which presuppose no necessary conditions or elements of cognition. The states which compose experience—the contents of consciousness—are reduced by Locke to two kinds,—those which are given to us through the external

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sense, and those which are given to us through the soul's internal sense of its own operations; or, as he designates them, to ideas of sensation and ideas of reflection. What Locke calls ideas Hume calls perceptions; and perceptions—*i.e.*, mental states of every kind—he reduces to impressions and ideas,—impressions being all those states which are produced in sensation, and ideas being the copies or images which the mind takes of them in thinking and reasoning. Impressions precede ideas, being the originals from which the latter are taken; and they are as a rule more forcible and lively. Impressions and ideas differ, however, only in degree—only in strength and vivacity. The theory thus virtually is that all mental states may be analysed into mere sensations. What are called ideas are represented as not essentially distinct from what are impressions, and should in consistency have been reduced to impressions, or, in other words, to sensations, as these are the only original impressions. Given sensations, and we should be able, according to the philosophical theory espoused by Hume, to explain how all knowledge, all minds, and the whole knowable universe have been formed out of them.

The theory is of an attractive but delusive simplicity. It includes, however, all that is essential in the creed of a self-consistent empiricism; and Hume's great merit was that, having adopted it, he was so true to it, and so courageously evolved what it implied. It was most desirable that there should be a clear exhibition of the consequences which naturally

## HUME'S SENSATIONISM

follow from the hypothesis that all the contents of consciousness may be traced back to and resolved into sensations, and that thoughtful men should thus be compelled to perceive that the path along which an empirical philosophy sought to lead the human mind was one which must bring it to a bottomless abyss. That service Hume thoroughly accomplished. Grant him his primary psychological assumptions, which are only those which every consistent and coherent form of empirical agnosticism must assume, and the most sweeping of his agnostic inferences plainly follow.

### II. HUME'S AGNOSTICISM IN GENERAL

Let us glance at some of those consequences of Hume's assumptions as to the origin and composition of experience in which the scepticism of his doctrine consists.

One of the most obvious is that there can be no such thing as knowledge at all. That all our knowledge is reducible to impressions and ideas means with Hume, as it must mean with every person who expresses his thought correctly in those terms, that we can have no knowledge of other things than impressions and ideas; no knowledge of an objective world, of a personal self, or of a Supreme Being; no knowledge of any kind of real existence. But no knowledge of reality is equivalent to no real knowledge. Hence the problem of psychology thus viewed is not that of explaining how impressions and ideas come to be a knowledge of real

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persons and objects, but how they come to be taken, or rather mistaken, for such knowledge. And that was the problem Hume grappled with. He asserted that we have no knowledge or experience except what is composed of states of consciousness; that the only components of consciousness are sensations and ideas (their copies); that the belief in realities beyond consciousness, to which impressions and ideas correspond, has no discoverable foundation; and that, consequently, all that mental science can be expected to do is to explain how mere states of mind come to appear to be a world of objects, and how the erroneous belief that we have a knowledge of external realities—or, in other words, that our supposed knowledge of them is knowledge and not illusion—takes irresistible possession of us. This is all that Hume has attempted to do as regards external realities. He has not sought to show that there are or are not such realities as material objects, but to show how, through the influence of custom on transient but recurrent sense-impressions, a belief which has no real or rational warrant in the existence of such objects may be imagined to have grown up. Thus Hume would destroy the world of the ordinary man, of the materialist, and of the realist. Having reduced knowledge to the sense-impressions and traces or images of them in individual minds, he makes it apparent that whatever may be fancied to lie beyond those subjective individual states nothing can be seen or known beyond them. His sensationism thus at once reveals itself as subjective idealism or illusionism, and at

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every onward step more fully so, until it stands disclosed as perhaps the completest example of such a philosophy which has ever appeared.

According to Hume we do not know external realities. Does he allow that we can have a real knowledge of ourselves? No. What he affirms is that the mind can know nothing except its own states. Hence it follows that it cannot know external reality. But it equally follows, as Hume rightly perceives, that it cannot know internal reality—*i.e.*, its own self. There can, indeed, be no internal reality in a mind of which the only constituents are mere states, no knowledge of self in a consciousness composed exclusively of series or groups of mere impressions. Hume does not deny that we naturally come to think of and believe in what we call the mind or self as an indivisible, permanent, and active principle or subject present in its states; but he maintains that we are not entitled so to think or believe, and that such an idea of mind or self is a "fiction" of the imagination. Of course there can be no knowledge of the reality of what has no reality. But, it may be said, he expressly allows that the mind can know its own states, although only its own states. That is true. But the admission certainly does not come to much. For there is, in the first place, the difficulty of understanding how "a fiction" can either have "states" or "know" them. And, waiving that difficulty as much too large a subject for treatment here, there is, in the second place, the very obvious fact that what Hume allows the mind may know is just what it can-



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not possibly know. The mind cannot know only its own states. It cannot know them unless as relating to something. It cannot know them without at least also knowing itself. Along with, or rather as correlative with, whatever is known, self or the ego is also known—is the simplest and most indubitable condition of knowledge. It is a law without which consciousness is inconceivable, knowledge impossible; and yet Hume will only grant us a consciousness of which every state, a knowledge of which every act, so contradicts this law as to be an unthinkable absurdity. In a word, he does away with all that can properly be spoken of as a knowledge of mind, and allows us to retain as such only what is manifestly unworthy of the name.

The character of Hume's theory of knowledge shows itself in its true and clearest light when applied to *substances*, whether things or persons. It resolves them all into less than dust and ashes, for even in dust and ashes there is something of reality, of being, of conceivability, whereas the elements into which Hume resolves all substances are the mere illusions of dreams which have no dreamers. Substances—all things which claim and seem to be existences—he holds are simply products of association and imagination. In his own words, a substance is "a collection of ideas, that are united by the imagination and have a particular name assigned them, by which we are able to recall either to ourselves or others that collection." Now, strange as such a view may seem to one who is unacquainted with the history of philoso-

## ITS APPLICATION TO SUBSTANCES

phy, even such an one may, perhaps, without difficulty see that Hume could not have consistently supposed substances to be more than he has defined them to be; that his hypothesis as to experience being completely analysable into sensations logically precluded his attributing to them any kind of external reality, independent existence, permanency, self-hood or the like. Indeed, even Hume here went further than he was entitled to go. For, while it is clear that if all that can be known may be resolved into states of mind, all that is known must consist of states of mind, and all so-called substances or things must be merely collections of states of mind although they are imagined to be of a very different nature, it is very far from clear how states or perceptions which have neither subject nor object—which are originally separate, successive, and in perpetual flux—can be *collected*. As nothing is supposed to exist save themselves, it would seem to follow that they must form themselves into those *collections of ideas* which are mistaken for *substances*. Hume has not explained himself on that point. Certainly he has not made out that any such wondrous feat was accomplished by mere series of transient sensations as gathering and grouping themselves into what men call their bodies and minds, the ocean, the earth, and the starry heavens.

But he applied his agnosticism as to substances in all directions. Thus he sought to convict material substances of non-existence. Berkeley had already resolved matter into phenomena dependent on the action and perception of mind, and maintained it to be

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essentially nothing more than the sum of its appearances to sense. But although he thus exhibited the material universe as merely phenomenal, he did not exhibit it as objectively unreal. He filled up the void left by the abstraction of material substance with active mind. What we call physical phenomena he ascribed to the impressions and suggestions of the Divine Spirit on the spirit of man ; and all the mathematical relations and natural laws of the universe he represented as simply manifestations of the Supreme Intelligence. Hume cordially assented to his reasoning so far as it led to a purely negative result—the elimination of “ material substance ” ; but he decidedly rejected what was positive in its conclusion—the reference of sense-appearances to the energy and operation of Deity as their true and sole source. That he pronounced a view “ too bold ever to carry conviction with it to a man sufficiently apprised of the weakness of human reason and the narrow limits to which it is confined.” Yet the view which he substituted for it was, in reality, far bolder. It was that the whole material universe and all its contents, as apprehended by each individual, is the creation of that individual’s imagination and affected by the hypostatizing of impressions impressed by nothing objective on nothing subjective. Hume explicitly and completely accepted this view, pronouncing externality a fiction due to association, and arguing that space and time are mere ideas which imply nothing external or real. The hypothesis of Berkeley is a timid and cautious one if compared with the one which

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Hume would have us accept as specially in accordance with the feebleness and narrowness of our reasons. The boldness of the idealistic theologian has often been thus exceeded by the professed modesty of the empiricistic sceptic.

Hume took a still bolder step. It was one which Berkeley saw might be made, on the supposition that the denial of spiritual substance followed naturally from the same principles which had led himself to the denial of material substance. He protested, however, against its being taken on the ground that we are conscious of our own being but not of the existence or essence of matter. Hume paid no attention to the protest, and treated mind just as he had treated matter. "What we call mind," he says, "is nothing but a heap or collection of impressions united together by certain relations, and supposed, though falsely, to be endowed with a perfect simplicity and identity." The appeal to consciousness, he maintains, fails to assure us of the existence of any minds or selves which are not such mere heaps or collections of impressions. And, of course, it is not directly applicable to any mind or self save one's own. Hume himself, however, showed forgetfulness of the bearing of this fact when he wrote: "I venture to affirm of the rest of mankind that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity and are in a perpetual flux and movement. . . . There is properly no simplicity in it [the mind] at one time, nor identity in different: whatever natural propen-

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sion we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity."

Hume was not entitled to affirm this of the rest of mankind until they had affirmed it of themselves. His inability to see in other men more than such *bundles* as he describes could only be a proof of the defectiveness of his vision if they recognised in themselves the unity and permanency, the self-identity, self-consciousness, and self-activity which he denied to them. He could only express directly the testimony of his own consciousness.

That he has attempted to do, and in doing so he has boldly ventured to deny his having any consciousness of a self. "For my part," he writes, "when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular conception or other—of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception." Can this statement, however, be accepted? Manifestly not, for it is wholly self contradictory. It implicitly affirms what it expressly denies, and implicitly denies what it expressly affirms. "*When I enter into myself I always stumble on some particular perception.*" Granted; but then in every such case *you* are there as well as the perception. "*I never catch myself at any time without a perception.*" Nobody supposes you do, but do you not catch *yourself* with *your* perceptions? "*I never can observe anything but the perception.*" Oh, but that is incorrect even according to your own account,

## HUME ON CAUSALITY

seeing that you say it is *you who observe the perception*. Whoever perceives catches himself perceiving, and therefore himself along with the perception. He never finds a mere perception any more than a mere self in his experience. Hence Hume might as well have denied his perceptions as his self—only in that case, as he allowed of nothing but perceptions, he would have had nothing whatever either on which to base or with which to build up his philosophy. In a word, what Hume tries to represent as the testimony of his consciousness is at this point so preposterously sceptical that his language refuses to convey it. Could any human language have given to it a self-consistent expression?

Maintaining that mind was nothing but series or collections of transient perceptions, Hume could not, of course, allow that a Supreme Mind would supply any ground of unity or permanence in the universe. Mind was, according to him, as devoid of unity and permanence as matter. If, however, material objects and human minds alike are nothing but so many bundles of particular perceptions, any difficulties which we may have as to the possibility and intelligibility of these bundles will not be removed by reference to a bundle called the Supreme Mind.

The scepticism of Hume does not spare even mathematics. He perceived that it could not consistently confine itself to what professed to be physical, mental, or theological science. From mere sensations it is impossible to derive the universal ideas on which necessary and exact deductions are dependent. If



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all knowledge be reducible to contingent and particular sensations, one can establish no right to lay down any proposition as an axiom—as necessarily and universally true. Hume saw this, and therefore described even geometry as only approximately true. “When geometry,” he says, “decides anything concerning the proportions of quantity, we ought not to look for the utmost precision and exactness. None of its proofs extend so far. It takes the dimensions and proportions of figures justly, but roughly, and with some liberty. Its errors are never considerable, nor would it err at all did it not aspire to such absolute perfection.” Such a view of the nature of mathematical science is a fair inference from Hume’s theory of knowledge, yet to have drawn it is a proof of his candour, since he could not have failed to anticipate that his readers would generally regard it as a reason for rejecting any theory or philosophy which implied it.

Our author’s views as to causality were, perhaps, those which attracted most attention. They are thoroughly characteristic of his agnosticism. He admits that we believe that every object which begins to exist must have a cause; he allows that in this our natural belief the idea of necessary connection is involved; and he elaborately shows that the belief is the foundation of all other beliefs and inferences as to matters of fact. His agnosticism, in a word, does not show itself in denial of the idea or belief, but in the full admission of its existence and an emphatic insistence on its importance conjoined with a strenuous

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contention that it has no warrant either in sense or reason. He could have had no objection to any one referring it to instinct, for if all our reasoning as to matters of fact be dependent on an irrational instinct it must, of course, be itself irrational, and that was just what Hume held. He could not have admitted that it was any refutation of him to insist on the apparent universality and necessity of the belief, for unless it were seemingly universal and necessary he could not infer it to be an invariable and constitutional illusion of the human mind. What he applied himself to establish was that for the sense of universality and necessity inseparable from the belief in causality no justification was to be found either in reason or experience; that the only ground for it and for all the reasonings and conclusions dependent on it is custom or association,—a repetition of successive impressions which produces in us the delusion that one always is and always must be the cause of the other, and even the delusion that every change or event must have a cause. “After a repetition of similar instances, the mind is carried by habit, upon the appearance of an event, to expect its usual attendant, and to believe that it will exist. The connection which we feel in the mind, this customary transition of the imagination from one object to its usual attendant, is the sentiment or impression from which we form the idea of power or necessary connection. Nothing farther is in the case.” Yet, according to Hume, the causal belief, although only “the offspring

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of experience engendered by custom," is the source of all orderly and developed experience: the principle on which it is built up; the foundation of all reasoning regarding empirical objects, the only objects to which in his opinion reasoning is at all applicable. In other words, he represents the very basis of all seemingly intelligible experience as an illusion, and its contents when analysed as devoid of a single element of rationality.

Hume's general theory of belief is not less sceptical than his theory of the causal belief. Belief is of its very nature a protest against scepticism, and the sceptic, in order to vindicate his own consistency, must explain the true nature of it away. This Hume attempted. He represented belief as less akin to judgment than to imagination, and as indeed only an intenser and livelier form of imagination. He distinguished belief from imagination not by what really differentiates them—the fact that the former does and the latter does not imply a real or supposed apprehension of truth—but by the greater vivacity and force of the former as compared with the latter. He thus implicitly denied belief to be what it really is, and ignored the numerous instances in which it is weaker and less vivid than imagination; but, unquestionably, if he had been able to substantiate his theory of belief he would have gained a decisive victory for his scepticism.

The agnosticism of Hume, so far as it has up to this point been before us, must be admitted to be both radical and consistent. Thoroughness is its most

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manifest characteristic. It goes straight to the very bases of belief, to the ultimate foundations of knowledge, and does not shrink to draw from its premisses their natural inferences even when most likely to cause unrest and alarm. And in this lies its chief merit, and the reason why it has exerted so great an influence as it has done on the development of philosophy and of thought in general. It compelled philosophers to concern themselves anew and earnestly with the deepest and most essential questions intelligence can raise, and to seek clearness and certainty as to the conditions which underlie all investigations and must determine the worth of all the efforts of reason to reach truth. It thus rendered inevitable a change in philosophic thinking from halfness towards wholeness, from superficiality towards profundity, which necessarily affected other forms of thinking.

### III. HUME'S AGNOSTICISM IN RELIGION

Holding the views which have been indicated, Hume must have been a singularly inconsistent thinker had he not been an agnostic in religion. In that case he would obviously have been unfaithful to the spirit, the principles, and the conclusions of his philosophy. He can be charged with no such inconsistency. He was as agnostic in religion as in philosophy. He has sought to undermine all religious knowledge, all rational faith. Although well endowed with natural and social affections, his spiritual susceptibilities were not strong, and hence his scepti-

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cal reasonings were little checked or disturbed by his feelings even in the religious sphere. His intellect had little emotional resistance to overcome even when treating the most momentous religious questions as freely and coolly as if they were mere metaphysical puzzles without any practical bearing on life and conduct. It was thus that he treated them. The dependence of religious opinion on philosophical speculation has never been more obvious than in Hume's case.

While Hume, however, may be fairly described as not less agnostic in theology than in philosophy, he ought not to be represented as more so. He showed no special desire to throw doubt or discredit on religion. He simply dealt with it on the same principles, in the same spirit, and after the same manner as he dealt with physical nature and the human mind; that is to say, he was, so far as his speculations were concerned, about as consistently and completely agnostic as an agnostic can be in the religious as in other spheres. I repeat, *so far as his speculations were concerned*. I do not speak of his *personal belief*, nor do I think that we know exactly what that was either in philosophy or in theology. It clearly did not coincide in either with his speculations. He saw that his principles led to conclusions which left no room for science or philosophy and could not be consistently and completely accepted without arresting all thought and action, and he did not pretend so to accept them, although he professed not to see on what other principles he could proceed or what other conclusions he

## HUME NOT HOSTILE TO RELIGION

could deduce from them. We have no reason to suppose that it was otherwise as regards religion.

There are no traces in Hume's writings, or in his correspondence, or in trustworthy accounts of him, of hostility to religion. He objected to being called a Deist, and manifestly because the name implied antagonism to Christianity. He did not directly assail Christianity. His reticence in regard to it was in striking contrast to the attitude and conduct of the English Deists and the French Encyclopedists. He was the intimate friend of some of the most eminent divines of Scotland in his day,—able and cultured men, but certainly not sceptical as to the truth of Christianity. In his intercourse with them religious subjects were avoided, plainly by a sort of tacit understanding on both sides, only explicable, I think, by their recognition of the difference between "Davie" Hume the natural man and David Hume the celebrated Academical philosopher, and of the unreasonableness of expecting that the latter, whatever might be the personal faith of the former, would disavow his speculations so long as he did not see that they had been refuted. When his friend Mr. Boyle attributed the uncommon grief manifested by him on the death of his mother to his having thrown off the principles of religion and so deprived himself of its consolations, his answer, we are told, was, "Though I throw out my speculations to entertain the learned and metaphysical world, yet in other things I do not think so differently from the rest of the world as you imagine."



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Hume did not profess to be a philosopher except when he was philosophising. He did not attempt to conform to his scepticism when he wrote on political subjects, or composed the *History of England*, or enjoyed the society of his friends. Why should he be supposed to have done so in regard to religion? Is it because he has occasionally spoken as if his theories merely undermined religion and metaphysical speculation, and has even told the students of science that theirs is the only kind of knowledge worth possessing? But he has as explicitly told theologians that faith cannot be overthrown by reason and that "Divine Revelation is the most solid of foundations." Like so many "academical philosophers" Hume was quite willing to compliment science and reason at the expense of religion and faith, or religion and faith at the expense of science and reason, although aware, or perhaps rather because aware, that reason and faith, science and religion, were alike uncertain, if his scepticism were true.

*If his scepticism were true; he was not unconscious of the if there—not unsceptical of his own scepticism. To what extent he was so we shall probably never know. It was not his business, and still more manifestly not his interest, to enlighten the world on that point. What he has made clear, however, is that those who adopt his premisses must be prepared to adopt his conclusions, and even must in the main accept them all, seeing that those which bear destructively on ordinary knowledge and science are not less legitimately drawn than those which affect religion.*

## HUME'S AGNOSTICISM IN RELIGION

Those who adopt his premisses and draw only conclusions unfavourable to religion show that their logic is biassed by anti-religious prejudices.

In theology the agnosticism of Hume had the same characteristic and merit as in philosophy, and the result was the same. Here too it was thorough; it went to the foundations—passed by all questions of secondary importance, and dealt with those on which the entire fate of religion as a claimant to reason depended. And here too this was, on the whole, a decided service to religion, the deepest truths of which are only to be conclusively established through exclusion of the deepest doubts. The decisive and ultimate victories of faith must be those gained over unbelief as to what is absolutely fundamental and essential. Hume helped more than any one else of his time to do away with halfness and superficiality in theology no less than in general philosophy. He convinced thinkers that the Deistic assumption of the self-evident certainty of so-called *natural religion* was a mere assumption; that *natural religion* was no more indubitable than *revealed religion*; that both those who would attack and those who would defend religion must go deeper down than they had been doing. The change introduced by Hume was thus a very great one. It was the agitation, so far as religion was concerned, not merely of the question, What in it is true? but also of the question, Whether or not there is any truth in it?

His denial of the ability of the mind to rise above sensible experience, and his views of substance, cause,

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and personality, left him no principles on which he could justify belief in the Divine existence. And he did not seek to justify it. On the contrary, while he did not openly assail it, he, in his character of philosophic sceptic, endeavoured to show that what had been regarded as its rational bases were untrustworthy.

He set aside as not deserving of discussion the opinion that we know God by intuition. Those who hold that opinion should take note of Hume's estimate of it, instead of merely attaching, as they so often do, an excessive value to his criticisms of the theistic proofs.

The *a priori* argument he rejected without any serious consideration. Whatever had an appearance of a scholastic origin or character got slight justice from him. His treatment of the *a priori* proof strikingly exemplifies this. Instead of being studied with interest or insight, instead of being examined and judged with impartiality and care, it is summarily condemned on the assumption that every matter of fact is a contingent existence—a mere and most doubtful assumption which manifestly begs the whole question at issue.

The reasoning by which Hume attempted to get rid of the *a posteriori* proof is ingenious, and has not undeservedly attracted much attention. It is entirely founded, however, on his agnostic view of causality, and must appear inconclusive to those who do not accept that view. It is equally in his peculiar view of causality that he finds the principle of his celebrated argument against the doctrine of a future dis-

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tribution of rewards and punishments. The arguments just referred to I do not require either to expound or examine. It is sufficient for my purpose to have thus referred to them. It will not be questioned by any one that, if they be valid, belief in God and the immortality of the soul must be without rational warrant, the so-called "light of nature" an illusion, and all so-called natural religion merely blind instinct, inherited prejudice, caprice, and superstition.

The most valuable and interesting, perhaps, of Hume's writings regarding religion is his *Natural History of Religion*. This treatise had the great merit of initiating that historical method of studying religion which has been found so fruitful. In it Hume very properly distinguished between the reasons and the causes of religion—*i.e.*, between the grounds which may be adduced in vindication of it and the motives or influences which may have actually evoked it and made it what it is: and with no less justice showed that in dealing with religion simply as a historical phenomenon we have only to do with its causes, not with its reasons as such. He likewise quite correctly showed that its causes had often not been reasons but imaginations, feelings, casual occurrences—illusions produced by fears and desires, external causes and circumstances.

But when he endeavoured to produce the impression that the reasons of religion were not among its causes, or even that reason had ever been entirely without influence in the formation of religion, his scepticism made itself manifest, and led him to con-

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travene and contradict the truth. Thus to dissociate religion from reason was consistent with his agnosticism, but it is not warranted by the history of religion when studied in a strictly historical manner. The rational apprehension of religious truth has often been far from the strongest factor in the rise and growth of religion, but it has always been a factor. In keeping it out of sight Hume ignored what alone explains why the history of religion has been the progressive movement which he himself represented it to be. He was candid enough to recognise that the history of religion had, on the whole, from beginning to end, steadily advanced towards reasonableness, growingly increased in consistency. But if so, must not the inspiration and power of reason have pervaded it throughout? Must not a continuous progress towards truth be one essentially true? Must not the history of religion, even as treated by Hume and by many since Hume, as well as by students of every kind who have shown regard for its facts, be allowed to be one which bears testimony not for but against agnosticism as to religion?

Hume dealt with revelation agnostically in his celebrated *Essay on Miracles*. He assumed revelation to be essentially miraculous, and only provable, if provable at all, by miracles of an external character perceptible by the senses. Many Christian apologists of the present day would decidedly refuse to admit the assumption, or to accept the conceptions of revelation and miracle which it presupposes, but they were universally received by the contemporaries of Hume.

## “ESSAY ON MIRACLES”

Besides, even although it may be said that his ideas of revelation and miracle belonged to an age which has to a considerable extent vanished, his mode of treating them must be allowed to have been none the less thoroughly characteristic of his agnosticism.

He did not question the conceivability of miracles; he thought he had a distinct enough notion of them to define them as “violations of the laws of nature”—*i.e.*, events brought about not by natural means but by an agency above, beside, or opposed to nature. He did not attempt to prove the impossibility of miracles; he recognised that that could only be done by disproving the existence of God and of supernatural beings. But he undertook to show the incredibility of miracles—their unprovability to those who have not been witnesses of them. Experience, he argued, assures us that the laws of nature are invariable, while human testimony is deceptive, and can never therefore certify a deviation from these laws a miracle. Even if witnesses were always trustworthy, and if there were a full proof from testimony in favour of a miracle, it would only be equal to the full proof from experience which is against it, and consequently could not entitle us to prefer belief in a miracle to belief in the inviolable uniformity of natural law. Hence a miracle, even if attested by testimony in the highest possible degree, can never be rendered credible in the lowest degree, but in reality never is so attested, seeing that testimony is frequently erroneous and mendacious.

Such is the general tenor of his argument—one



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which it is not necessary to criticise or to endeavour to show to be fallacious, but of which it may be desirable to indicate how agnostic it is.

First, then, the argument while denying that a miracle can ever be so proved as to be credible allows that it conceivably might be fully proved, as fully proved as a law of nature. It is only because testimony has not been found to be universally true that the proof in favour of a miracle is represented as necessarily weaker than the proof in favour of a law of nature. But it is easily supposable that human testimony might have been always veracious and accurate. Suppose it to have been so. What would then, according to Hume's own account, and if his argument be valid, be the state of a human intellect in the presence of testimony in favour of a miracle? This: there would be *a full proof for* and *a full proof against* the miracle—an equal proof on opposite sides to which no addition could be made, and a perfectly truthful human intellect cognisant of both but utterly incapable of ever coming to a rational decision for or against either the miracle or the related law of nature. It suits admirably an agnostic like Hume to devise an argument which thus implies that the human mind, even at its best estate and in the most favourable circumstances, must be of a whimsical and absurd nature; but a non-agnostic can hardly fail to regard such an argument as in the highest degree suspicious even prior to logical scrutiny.

Further, were the argument in question valid, a thing might be true, and clearly seen to be true, and

## HIS ARGUMENT EXAMINED

yet evidence of its truth might be impossible to be given to those who were not eye-witnesses of it. It is an argument to the effect that even if a miracle occurred, its having occurred could not be made known to any one who did not see it take place. Now, that a thing may be true while one has not sufficient evidence of its truth, is an obvious and incontestable proposition; but that a thing may be true and have been observed, and yet that no sufficient evidence can be given for it to others than the eye-witnesses, is an assertion of a very different kind, and indeed a paradox which could only originate in an agnostic imagination, and which implies that there is an impassable gulf between man's mind and a certain class of real or at least conceivable facts.

Still further, if the principle of Hume's argument be valid it should prove more than he inferred from it; it should prove that even the eye-witness of a miracle could not have sufficient evidence of its existence to make belief of it rational. The ground on which Hume rejects the evidence of testimony when adduced in support of a miracle is simply that testimony does not invariably correspond to the truth of facts, while the laws of nature are, it is alleged, invariable. But the testimony of sense itself is not always accordant with the truth of facts. We see wrongly according to the laws of vision as well as correctly. The senses deceive us, and there is no miracle involved in their deceiving us. Hence on Hume's principles even the senses can in no circumstances afford a sufficient proof of the occurrence of a miracle. His ar-

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gument not only places an impassable barrier between the truth and those who have heard it reported by others, but raises an insurmountable barrier between a man's own mind and what may happen before his eyes.

Finally, Hume directly sought by his argument concerning miracles to justify scepticism as to revelation, and so regarded the argument was not less relevant than ingenious. If valid at all, what it proves can be no less than that God could not make known His character or will to mankind otherwise than through the laws of nature; that even if He wished to put Himself in direct and special communication with His creatures He could by no means carry His desire into effect. That is a thoroughly agnostic conception, and yet how much gnosticism there is in thus attempting to limit the power of omnipotence.

The speculative attitude of Hume towards religion has been thus described by himself when concluding his *Treatise* on its *Natural History*. "The whole is a riddle, an enigma, an inexplicable mystery. Doubt, uncertainty, suspense of judgment, appear the only result of our most accurate scrutiny concerning this subject. But such is the frailty of human reason, and such the irresistible contagion of opinion, that even this deliberate doubt could scarcely be upheld, did we not enlarge our view, and, opposing one species of superstition to another, set them a quarrelling; while we ourselves, during their fury and contention, happily make our escape into the calm, though obscure, regions of philosophy." Such by his own con-

## ISSUE OF HUME'S PHILOSOPHY

fession was the final issue of a thorough and complete scepticism. But what a dismal, dreadful issue! For the vast majority of mankind, who certainly cannot escape into the regions of philosophy, no hope, no refuge, only the doom of living and dying in the darkness of delusion. For the few who, like Hume himself, can escape into them, no prospect beyond that of finding them as empty, as unreal, as unsatisfying as he has repeatedly and pathetically confessed them to be, and as obscure, as enigmatic, as uncertain as the region out of which they had fled.

It must now, I think, be apparent that those who have seen no scepticism in the speculations of Hume have not examined them very closely, and that any characterisation of Hume as a philosopher which ignores the agnostic in him is quite like an estimate of the play of *Hamlet* which leaves Hamlet out of account. All else in the mind and activity of Hume can no more make up Hume if his agnosticism be excluded than the other characters of the drama can make up *Hamlet* if the Prince of Denmark be omitted. It is an injustice to Hume himself not to place his agnosticism in a clear light, for it is above all that which gave him, and still gives him, his eminent place and immense significance in the history of philosophy. It was what opened the eyes of Reid and of his followers to the necessity of seeking anew for the foundations of knowledge and belief. It was what roused Kant, as he himself avowed, out of his "dogmatic slumber," and compelled him to undertake those labours in which all subsequent German philos-

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ophy may be held to have originated. It was what directly and immediately evoked the latest great stage or phase of philosophy, the one which influences so powerfully all contemporary thought and life. The scepticism of Hume deservedly made its author's name immortal and his influence enormous. It had all the comprehensiveness and thoroughness appropriate to a radical scepticism, while easily intelligible and free from all scholastic formalism, technicalities, and pedantry. It was singularly bold and unsparing, and yet skilfully conciliatory. It presented the most subtle thoughts in an attractive form. And, further, it was a really logical deduction from long dominant and widely accepted philosophical principles. As the means of bringing to light the erroneous-ness of those principles it was a needed, a reasonable, and even a providential thing. The justification of it has been ample, being whatever is true and good in the intellectual and spiritual development to which it has given rise.

### IV. KANT'S ANSWER TO HUME

The theories of Hume could not fail to be perceived to have an immense significance for philosophy and theology, for science, religion, and morality. They brought fully to light the scepticism latent in the empiricism derived from Bacon, Gassendi, and Hobbes, and at the same time made manifest that the dogmatic rationalism which had appeared as Cartesianism, Spinosism, and Wolfianism could supply no rational

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answer to it. In a word, they plainly showed the necessity for a thorough revision not only of British but of European speculative thought. They required a refutation of such a kind as could only be obtained through a reinvestigation of the entire problem of knowledge.

Thomas Reid and Immanuel Kant clearly recognised the necessity and sought to meet it. Their answers to Hume were to a considerable extent identical or accordant, and to that extent they were substantially satisfactory. Kant's answer was reached through a process of investigation much more profound and systematic than Reid's, but one which often led him to false conclusions, and, indeed, issued at many points in a scepticism as radical as Hume's own. Like Reid, he conclusively showed that knowledge could not be reduced to sensations, and that intelligence implied in all its operations necessary conditions as well as contingent impressions, and so far he substantially disposed of the scepticism of Hume by proving its dependence on an inadequate and erroneous psychology. But when he proceeded to argue that the constitutive principles involved in knowledge have to do only with phenomena or states of conscious experience, but are wholly incapable of placing us face to face with things; that they have a merely subjective and relative value, but give us no information as to external reality; that while useful in co-ordinating and unifying our perceptions they in no degree justify our affirming that there is anything corresponding to these perceptions,—then he virtually un-



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did his own work, and became not the conqueror but the lineal successor of Hume. Reid was too single and simple minded thus "both to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds." Hence his work as a philosopher, although far inferior to Kant's in most respects, was greatly superior to it in consistency. It was wholly anti-agnostic. With it, therefore, we need not here further concern ourselves. With Kant's, however, we have still to do, although only in so far as it is agnostic.

The limits within which a sketch like the present must be confined forbid my attempting either to describe or refute at length the agnosticism of Kant. I must, in fact, restrict myself to indicating the respects in which I dissent from what is peculiar to it and essential in it. All that is so is contained in one work, *The Critique of Pure Reason*; and, indeed, is just what is distinctive of the three theories expounded in that work and derived by Kant from his examination of the three faculties which in his view have to do with knowledge, namely, sense, understanding, and reason. All else in the *Criticism* is merely scaffolding, not building.

Hume had explained away everything like necessary connection in thought. He had dissolved, by analysis, all apparent knowledge into unintelligibility. He had got rid of all synthetic judgments. That being the general result of his scepticism, the general problem with which Kant had to grapple was to show that there were necessary synthetic judgments so rooted in the very constitution of intelli-

## TRANSCENDENTAL ÆSTHETIC

gence that they could not be rationally destroyed by any analysis. To solve it he raised three questions: Are synthetic *a priori* judgments possible in mathematics? Are such judgments possible in physics? And, are they possible in metaphysics? The first question he answered affirmatively in his critical theory of cognition through sense (his *transcendental æsthetic*); the second also affirmatively in his critical theory of cognition through understanding (*transcendental analytic*); and the third negatively by his critical theory as to cognition through reason (*transcendental dialectic*).

### § I. TRANSCENDENTAL ÆSTHETIC

The general scope of Kant's investigation into the capacity through which objects are given and perceptions furnished to us may be thus stated. The effect of an object upon the senses is a sensation. The sort of perception which relates to an object by means of sensation is an empirical intuition; and the undetermined object is a phenomenon. That in the phenomenon which corresponds to the sensation is (in Kantian phraseology) its *matter*, and that which causes it to be arranged under certain relations its *form*. The matter comes from without, the form must lie within to receive it. The form regarded wholly apart from the matter is said to be *pure*; the pure form of sense to be pure intuition. It is with the pure forms of sense or pure intuitions that Transcendental Æsthetic has to do; and to accomplish its work it first isolates the

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sensuous faculty from all other faculties of mind, and then takes away from intuition all that is given through sensuous impression, so that nothing may remain but pure intuition. The result, according to Kant, is the discovery that there are two, and only two, pure forms of sensuous knowing, viz., space and time—space the form of external sense, and time the form of internal, and, mediately, of external sense.

Was Kant entitled to affirm these positions? Not, it seems to me, at the outset of his critical inquiry; not until he had settled a number of questions which he never even distinctly raised.

He assumed, for example, that the sensuous faculty can be isolated from our other faculties of cognition. What, then, does the assumption amount to? Virtually to assuming the falsity of two doctrines well entitled to a careful discussion—the doctrine that sensation is the root of all thought, and also the doctrine that thought in its essentials, the reason in its generic integrity, is the condition of sensation. If all thought be, as experientialists hold, involved in and evolved out of sense, the separation of the sensuous faculty from other faculties is impossible, as the other faculties are developments or transformations of sense. The fact that Kant did not adopt the doctrine, but, on the contrary, aimed at definitely refuting it and thoroughly discrediting the sceptical conclusions which had been deduced from it, only made it so much the more necessary for him not to assume to be done what, according to the doctrine in question, could not possibly be done. And the necessity was yet further

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increased by the fact that most even of those who reject the empiricist theory of knowledge will so far agree with those who maintain it as to deny that sense can be separated from what else is in cognition in the way Kant supposes. The assumption that sensuous cognition is the result of an impression and a form—sight, for instance, of an impression produced by light without and received into the form of space within—is happily not the only alternative supposition to the view which would make sensuous cognition the result merely of the external impression.

Further, Kant began his investigation by dividing sensuous cognition into matter and form, on the assumption that the former comes from without and the latter from within. But was not starting thus, if not begging the question in dispute, at least unduly favouring a particular answer? Was it fair even to suggest at the outset that the form is in any respect more subjective than the matter? *Primâ facie* it seems just as probable that the form is without and the matter within, or that both form and matter are without or both within, as that the matter is without and the form within. Until proof is produced that space and time are within the mind or subjective, every mode of expression which implies that they are so may well be deemed objectionable.

Kant's account of the matter and the forms of sensuous cognition, it may be added, implies that the latter are so separate from and independent of the former as to be given in the mind previous to all experience and to exist in it as pure intuitions. That view, how-

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ever, does not seem to be confirmed by the observation or analysis of the processes of sensuous consciousness. We cannot apprehend space before or apart from experience. Any apprehension of space is already experience. We apprehend bodies as spatial, as external and extended, but have not the slightest consciousness of being in possession of an intuition of space which we superimpose on bodies and thereby attain to a knowledge of them. The so-called form and the so-called matter of sense-experience condition each the other, are inseparable, and are *not* related to each other as a subjective to an objective constituent. No sufficient reason has been shown for conceiving of space as given in the mind before all actual perceptions, or for representing its *a priori* character, assuming it to be of such a character, as dependent on its being merely subjective, simply a mental form. It would seem to be capable of being described with propriety as a form only in the sense that external objects must be apprehended and thought of as in it, and it only as capable of containing such objects and rendering possible their groupings and motions.

Kant's exposition of space was a remarkable and important piece of work. It opposed to experientialist accounts of the cognition of space a nativistic theory of a bold and ingenious character, containing a large amount of important truth, and presented with so much skill as to make an epoch in the history of the doctrine of external perception. For a lengthened period it was very generally regarded as having definitively shown the futility of attempting to trace

## KANT'S PECULIAR INFERENCES

the principles of mathematics to roots latent in experience. There is less confidence felt in it now among competently informed students of psychology. The problem is still under discussion, and expert opinion is as much divided regarding the solution of it as it ever was. Nevertheless the study of the subject to which it relates has certainly been in various respects much advanced since Kant wrote, and largely so because of the impulse which Kant gave. His views as to space and sense-perception no longer satisfy, but that is owing, perhaps, almost as much to their suggestions having been followed up as to their defects having been detected.

Kant has quite conclusively shown that the cognition of space is not a general notion, not a concept derived by abstraction and generalisation from a multitude of particulars. But he was hasty in inferring that because not a general notion it must be a pure intuition. A cognition may be *neither a general notion nor a pure intuition*. It may be also *either a particular notion or an impure intuition*. And, in fact, so far as space is apprehended through sense—and it is largely so apprehended through muscular mobility, touch, and vision—it is not apprehended by pure intuition. Berkeley and Hume, by showing that we cannot even imagine space apart from colour and figure, had refuted by anticipation Kant's view of the apprehension of pure space through sense-perception. And, it may be added, consciousness clearly testifies that in the most abstract, supersensuous, purely rational thought, space can only be cognised



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by us as that in which bodies may be contained, in which lines, circles, planes, cubes, &c., may be drawn or conceived to be drawn, and in which motions may take place or be imagined to take place.

As to the nature of space Kant draws from his investigations two distinctive and very peculiar inferences, both of which seem to me unwarranted.

The first is that space represents *no thing-in-itself or attribute of a thing-in-itself*. Now that inference was manifestly premature unless he himself knew what a thing-in-itself was, and until he had also informed his readers what it was. Yet he affirms and insists on the truth of the inference without giving any information as to the thing-in-itself. This is so illogical a procedure that one naturally seeks for an explanation of it; and that is not difficult to find. It is just that Kant started on his critical investigation with a bias in favour of a particular conclusion and worked steadily under its influence to the close of the investigation. What was that particular conclusion? This—that we neither know nor can know anything whatever about the thing-in-itself. Now, that such was Kant's belief was certainly a sufficient reason for his not explaining to us what a thing-in-itself is. It is rather strange, however, that he should not have seen that it was an equally sufficient reason for his not volunteering to tell us that space, or anything else, is not a thing-in-itself. Where knowledge ceases the right to deny ceases as well as the right to affirm. If we know and can know nothing about things-in-themselves, we cannot possibly be entitled to say either

## OBJECTIONS TO KANT'S VIEW

what belongs to them or what does not belong to them. If we know nothing about them, then, for anything we know space may belong to them, or may be one of them, if there be more than one of them. Further, the cause of our inability to know anything about them, and of our consequent inability to affirm or deny anything about them, is a most obvious one. It is that the very conception of the Kantian "Ding an sich" is, as has been said, "ein Unding." It is a pseudo-conception, an inconceivable conception, which owes its existence wholly to unreason. It has been a most disastrous conception, the seed of a vast growth of nonsense which has pretended to be knowledge or science or philosophy of the unknowable. One is sorry to have to say it, but Kant may be regarded as the father of all those who during the last hundred years have vainly laboured to acquire and communicate knowledge of the unknowable.

The second of Kant's inferences as to the nature of space is that it is only a subjective condition of sense. I admit none of the premisses from which the inference is drawn, and reject the inference itself. If space be not known by us as objective and external, nothing is so known by us, and we can have no intelligible and consistent conception of objectivity or externality. The mind has no consciousness of space as subjective. It knows it only as independent of itself, as out of itself, as what it and what the objects it knows are in. It knows it not as what is given by the mind, but as what is given to the mind and apprehended as an external quality. And we have no

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right to assume that it is not what it is apprehended as being. The testimony of consciousness must be accepted as true until proved to be illusory. Of proof that it is illusory none has been produced. For setting it aside no weightier reason has been assigned than the mere conjecture, the alleged possibility, that the perceptive faculty might have been so constituted that space and its relations would not have been valid to it. The conjecture has not been shown to be even intelligible, nor the alleged possibility to be, properly speaking, conceivable. The existence of intelligences incapable through their limitations of man's knowledge of space can prove nothing against the validity of his knowledge of it. Ignorance is no contradiction of knowledge. If, as some Jewish philosophers have maintained, God is not in space but space in God,—space not the place of God, but God the place of space,—or, if He in any other imaginable or even unimaginable way transcend space, it cannot be therefrom rationally inferred that man's geometry must be false in God's sight. Omniscience cannot regard any science as nescience, and still less any truth as an error. That the cognition of space is so far dependent on the constitution of the perceptive faculty may be admitted without any concession to the fiction of the subjectivity of space or of the possible or partial non-validity of necessary truth. An intellect for which the relations of space were not valid would be an intellect of such a kind that although its existence may be verbally affirmed it cannot be truly, *i.e.*, rationally, thought.

## KANT'S THEORY EXAMINED

To such objections as the foregoing Kant and his disciples can only reply that they do not deny space to be perceived by us as objective and real, and necessarily so perceived; that, on the contrary, they affirm it to be empirically real in the sense that it is objectively valid for us, inasmuch as necessarily seeming to contain all that can externally appear to us, and that by maintaining its transcendental ideality, as not being or belonging to any "thing-in-itself," they justify the common consciousness in believing in its empirical reality, which is all that is needed to repel scepticism. But to such a defence as that the obvious answer is that what they are charged with is precisely what they admit—namely, maintaining that space is real and objective in the sense of necessarily seeming so, and maintaining at the same time that it merely seems to be so, while actually ideal and subjective; and that to do so is not to attempt to repel scepticism but to vindicate it, and is, in fact, virtually to represent the human intellect as self-contradictory and untrustworthy. Consistently to hold both the empirical reality and the transcendental ideality of space is impossible. Nothing can be objectively valid for us which can be proved by us to be only subjectively existent. It may be added that if space be merely subjective the things perceived in space must be merely subjective also, and the most rational view of the universe will be that it lies, as Schopenhauer maintained, within the brain, or that it is, with all individual brains included, one vast illusory concept.

Kant's *doctrine of time* closely corresponds to his

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doctrine of space, and has the same defects, so that it may be left both unexplained and uncriticised. It is even less satisfactory, however, than his doctrine of space, inasmuch as it takes no notice of the differences between the cognition of time and that of space—differences so radical as to make it doubtful whether time ought not in consistency to have been ranked by Kant, as M. Pillon and other Neo-criticists hold, rather among the categories of the understanding than among the forms of sense.

The latter portion of the Transcendental Aesthetic consists of remarks meant to illustrate and enforce those two positions: 1st, Space and time are *conditions only of phenomena*; and 2nd, They are *the necessary conditions of phenomena*. They are the most distinctive positions in Kant's theory of sensuous knowledge, the theory on which his whole philosophy is based. Whoever denies either position must be ranked among his opponents, however highly he may admire his philosophical genius and in whatever other respects he may acknowledge his services.

Kant considers that the first of these positions delivers philosophy from great difficulties. To regard time and space as conditions only of phenomena disposes, he thinks, of all the metaphysical perplexities connected with them. These perplexities arise, in his opinion, simply from our forgetting that time and space are only valid within the sphere of phenomena, and cannot be legitimately made use of beyond it. To recognise that time and space are not real existences, but only conditions of sensuous knowing, is

## KANT'S SOLUTION CONSIDERED

sufficient, according to him, to free us at once from the otherwise insuperable difficulty of what he regards as the manifest absurdity of three infinities—space, time, and God. Other deliverance, he holds, there is none. Such is the problem which Kant raises, and such the solution which he gives to it.

Now ought he to have presented the problem in that form? Surely not. He required not merely to assume but to show that it was a real or rational problem. Belief in more infinities than one may be absurd, but it is plainly not self-evidently absurd. On the contrary, it is an indubitable fact that the human mind cannot but think of space as unbounded and of time as without beginning or end. That being the case, what is manifestly irrational is to regard them, prior to proof, as inconsistent with each other, or inconsistent with the existence of an Infinite Creative Intelligence. Kant gave no proof; nor has any one else.

Grant, however, the rationality of his problem, the reality of his so-called "insuperable difficulty," and consider only his proffered solution. Is it not a mere evasion? The absurdity, if there be any, which is alleged to constitute the difficulty, lies in our thinking, and in our being so constituted as to be unable not to think, two or more infinities. From that absurdity, however, if it be an absurdity, we can only be freed by being freed from the necessity of thinking those infinities. To make out the objective unreality of the infinities in themselves does not remove, does not diminish, the subjective self-contradiction involved



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in the thinking of them ; nay, it increases it, inasmuch as it removes the only ground on which we can hope to explain what difficulty there may be in conjointly thinking them—namely, that they are mysterious because real and infinite. If not real and infinite, if simply in us, why should they present in appearance and in thought such a perplexity ? Kant's famed "solution" is quite illusory.

His second position—namely, that space and time are the necessary conditions of phenomena—wards off, he thinks, the scepticism which had been based on the theory that all knowledge comes from experience, and establishes the possibility and validity of mathematics. And it might have done so had it not been bound and chained to the position already considered—the dogma that they are conditions only of phenomena and necessary only so far as our thinking is concerned. Conditions necessary only for us are not truly necessary. The notion of a necessity which does not transcend what is contingent and particular is essentially self-contradictory—the notion of a necessity which is not strictly and universally necessary. Scepticism does not deny that space and time are apprehended as necessary conditions of phenomena. Even the scepticism based on the theory that all knowledge comes from experience does not deny that ; it merely resolves the apprehension into an illusion by the way in which it explains its relation to experience. Hume did not deny that time and space appear to human thought as necessary, but, in consistency with his general theory of knowledge, he re-

## KANT'S SOLUTION ILLUSORY

fused to recognise that their necessity could be more than an appearance evoked out of sensations and their derivatives. Kant shows that the apprehension of time and space as necessary is not derivable from experience but presupposed by it, and yet argues that it is only in appearance objectively, and in reality merely subjectively valid. Now, that may be considered by some persons to place scepticism on a less easily refutable basis, but it is certainly not a refutation of it. The difference between the conclusion reached by Kant through his alleged refutation of the scepticism which founds on the assumption that all knowledge is derived from experience and the conclusion of that scepticism itself is not great; and, what difference there is, is not in its favour. If our apprehension of space and time as necessary and objective be only derivable from experience there may be some slight chance—a very slight one, I admit—of its being legitimately so derivable; but if that apprehension, although a primary element of the constitution of the mind, is not to be accepted as guaranteeing that space and time are what we necessarily believe them to be, the legitimacy of the apprehension is hopelessly beyond possibility of proof.

Kant did not attempt to give a comprehensive answer to the question raised by him: How is mathematical science possible? He gave a powerful impulse to the study of the theory of mathematical knowledge, but made to it no substantial contribution of his own. By mathematics he virtually meant geometry. And the reasoning by which he attempted to prove geom-

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etry to be possible only through space being *a priori* and subjective was inconclusive. It sufficed to show that the mind is endowed with a power of forming geometrical conceptions and drawing geometrical inferences, and also that that power, which includes various energies of intellect, is *a priori* in the sense of subjective, but no more. It entirely failed to show what specially required to be shown—namely, that the space which is presupposed in all the operations of geometrical definition, construction, and inference, is *a priori* in the sense of subjective. It proved that the mind, in order to be able to trace the relations of extension, must have its thorough mastery over geometrical conceptions through the possession of the power of constructing them; but it simply ignored the fact which is the real difficulty to the Kantian hypothesis in question—the fact that the power implied in every concept and process of geometry assumes space to be not constructed but given, to be not subjective but objective, to be not ideal merely but real.

### § II. TRANSCENDENTAL LOGIC: (A) ANALYTIC

From Transcendental Aesthetic Kant passes to Transcendental Logic, by which he means not what is commonly called Logic, but a science or exposition of the pure and *a priori* elements to be found in the constitution and use of thought. Transcendental Logic thus understood he divides into Analytic and Dialectic.

## KANT'S TRANSCENDENTAL LOGIC

As in the Transcendental *Æsthetic*, he had metaphysically criticised the faculty of sense and attempted to explain the possibility of mathematics; in the Transcendental *Analytic* he examines in the same way the faculty of understanding, and seeks to show how physical science is possible. In the *Æsthetic* he had allowed that phenomena, through being posited and co-ordinated in time and space,—the mental forms of sensibility,—become knowledge, although only knowledge in its lowest and crudest form, “a chaos of blurred perceptions”; but denied that they are, properly speaking, objects of thought until also operated on by the understanding and subjected to and synthesised by its forms. In order to be knowledge proper there must, he maintained, be the union of intuitions of sense with notions of the understanding. The sensuous faculty cannot think and the judging faculty cannot perceive. Neither faculty can do the work of the other, and consequently they must combine and co-operate in order to produce what may be worthy of the name of knowledge.

Kant's first endeavour in the *Analytic* is to bring to light all the *a priori* elements which the understanding imposes on the perceptions of sense in order to make them intelligible. Sense he had treated in the *Æsthetic* as essentially passive. In the *Analytic* he assumes understanding to be essentially active. The intuitions of sense imply the receptivity of impression; the notions of the understanding, on the contrary, imply the spontaneity of thought. All the operations of the understanding are reducible to ele-

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mentary acts of judgment, and, consequently, in order to know how many primitive pure notions of the understanding, or categories, as Kant calls them, there are, we only require to know how many species or forms of judgment there are. But this, he thinks, we do know. He accepts as firmly demonstrated and virtually complete the traditional doctrine of judgment to be found in all the ordinary text-books of Logic. Accordingly he holds that there are just four chief species of judgments—those of quantity, quality, relation, and modality—and that each of these has three kinds of judgment under it, so that there are twelve sub-species, neither more nor less, each having a distinct *a priori* condition underlying it, and only one such, while all are so connected as to constitute a general system of *a priori* notions regulative of the understanding within the whole sphere of its operations.

Having obtained his so-called categories of the understanding, Kant proceeds to what he found to be the most difficult task he ever undertook, the “transcendental deduction” of them, or, in simpler terms, the showing that they must apply to objects, and how, and to what extent. He starts by laying stress on an unquestionably and supremely important fact; on a still higher principle than either the forms of sensuous intuition or the categories of logical judgment—“the original synthetic unity of apperception—the combining self-conscious activity of a self-identical ego, underlying alike all impressions of sense and all operations of judgment.” Without such a centre of

## ALLEGED NECESSITY OF THE CATEGORIES

convergence and basis of permanence no conjunctions of sense and understanding can be supposed to generate knowledge of any kind or degree.

There follows what is represented as "the deduction" itself—the alleged proof that the categories are necessary for the determination of objects, and that only objects obtained through sense—contained in sensuous experience—are determined by the categories. The aim of it is obvious enough, but its success, in my opinion, is *nil*. It is, even in the second edition, the merest semblance of a "deduction." Instead of a methodical and orderly process of argumentation, there is only a diffuse, lumbering, and pointless repetition in uncouth modes of expression of the doctrine to be proved—namely, that the categories, along with the synthetic unity of apperception, while *a priori* and possessed of a necessary and universal validity so far as sensuous experience is concerned, have no validity beyond it.

On the other hand, what Kant has written in the last sections of the *Analytic* regarding the "Schematism of the Categories," "Axioms of Intuition," "Analogies of Experience," and "Postulates of Empirical Thought," is, to say the very least of it, most ingenious and suggestive.

Kant's exposition of the theory of knowledge strictly so called may be considered as coming to a close with the *Analytic*, seeing that only *sense and understanding* are regarded by him as really and directly faculties of knowledge. The *reason* dealt with in the *Dialectic* is not such a faculty. It is represent-



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ed as indirectly aiding the acquisition of knowledge, but also as contributing nothing of its own to knowledge. At this point, therefore, it may be well for me to look back for a moment at the Kantian theory of knowledge and note as briefly as possible some of the chief points or features of it.

It has certain obvious merits. Contrast it with the theory of knowledge which it was meant to displace, the theory of Hume, and some of them at least at once *sautent aux yeux*. For example—(a) As regards recognition of the complexity of knowledge, the object to be accounted for, Kant and Hume differ greatly, and the difference is wholly in favour of Kant. Hume's reduction of knowledge to isolated and arbitrarily associated impressions of sense must seem a manifest *reductio ad absurdum* of his analysis to every one who really sees what knowledge includes and involves. Its simplicity is sufficient to condemn it. It is not so with Kant's analysis, which is far more adequate. (b) Kant's theory is also vastly superior to Hume's as regards recognition of the spontaneity involved in knowing. It represents the understanding as essentially self-active, and lays stress on an operation of supreme epistemological importance—"the synthetic unity of apperception." That act Hume ignored. He found no place in the cognitive process, or elsewhere in the mind, for self-activity. (c) Another respect in which the Kantian theory excels the Humian, and all other exclusively empirical theories of cognition, is its exhibition of one large class of the elements or constituents of knowl-

## HUME AND KANT COMPARED

edge as characterised by *necessity and universality*. (d) Again, while Hume sought to show that nature and experience are not consistently interpretable in any terms, both the Æsthetic and the Analytic of Kant tend throughout to prove that the world as known to man—the world alike of ordinary knowledge and of exact science, mathematical and physical—is one which can only be interpreted *in terms of mind*, a truth of prime importance in the controversy with empiricism, and with the scepticism based on empiricism. (e) And, further, although both Hume and Kant did even more to advance epistemology by stimulating others to inquiry than by what they themselves discovered, the suggestiveness of the latter's work was of much the higher and richer kind. Hume, a sceptic by temperament as well as in intellect, with all his extraordinary acuteness, clearness, and subtility, was the very genius of negation, but only that; he was content to bring all knowledge into suspicion, and yet to rest in his scepticism. He compelled attention to be directed to the most radical doubts and terrible questions, but gave no help as to how the doubts were to be removed and the questions answered. The good David did not feel at all called upon to act as “a guide to the perplexed.” Kant, although he so far fell into scepticism, being not a sceptic either by temperament or with intention, was earnestly anxious to overcome it, to answer Hume, and to conquer his own deepest doubts. Hence, although he may justly be reckoned as one of the fathers of modern agnosticism, he may be also as fairly credited with having done much tow-

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ards the refutation of it. His work was as largely constructive as destructive. His suggestiveness has been, not as Hume's, negative, but positive in character. Scarcely another epistemologist has scattered abroad so many seminal thoughts which have taken root and ripened. Many even of his incidental, or at least undeveloped, observations—as, *e.g.*, several of those to be found in his discussion on the categories (in the *Analytic*)—have exercised an extraordinary influence on the development of modern speculation.

There were so many excellent, ingenious, and novel ideas in Kant's theory of knowledge that it most naturally excited great interest in the philosophical world, and strongly influenced the course of philosophical opinion. There are many even now who deem it, on the whole, a satisfactory doctrine. As I do not share that view, I must briefly indicate my objections to it.

1. Kant, in his attempt to explain the possibility of knowledge, tacitly assumed that he required to have to do only with the intellect and its powers. It was an assumption very natural for a man in his time to make, but it was a mere assumption. In conjunction with the crude view of “faculties” prevalent among the psychologists of Kant's day, it led him to treat his whole subject in an artificial and mechanical fashion. He starts on his investigation without any attempt to determine either what knowledge is or how it has become what it is. The deepest roots of knowledge may lie far below so-called intellectual powers; may be the

## KANT'S THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

earliest and simplest impulses of sentient and volitional consciousness; nay, must be so if there be any truth in the modern doctrine of psychological evolution. In man, as in all earthly beings, learning to know has been chiefly the result of requiring to act. No knowledge of any kind is the product or the property of any "faculty," or group of faculties, or department of mind. The minimum in knowledge is *a self* with an object or objects in relation to it. All human knowledge and all growth in knowledge are only possible and intelligible where there are along with objects entire minds, true selves, directed to them, acting on them, and influenced by them. Kant in the conduct of his investigation proceeds on lines quite incompatible with that truth. He isolates intelligence from mind as a whole, takes account only of theoretical thought on the radically erroneous assumption of its being essentially distinct from practical reason, cuts off "the sensuous faculty" from self or mind, and separates it sharply even from "the understanding," the other faculty of knowledge. In all these respects he seems to me to have been at fault.

2. After detaching and isolating sense in the way described, Kant nevertheless represents it as supplying some sort of knowledge, and as even furnishing the whole matter or content of knowledge. Professor Ferrier has so very effectively shown how serious an error it is to regard sense as capable of itself yielding any sort of intelligible data to the mind, and how much depends on making it apparent that *matter*

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*per se* is contradictory and *sensuous perceptions per se* nonsensical, that I content myself with a reference to what he has written.<sup>1</sup> The assumption that the whole matter or content of knowledge originates in sense-perceptions is an error quite as great. The matter or content of experience, no careful study of consciousness can fail to inform us, comes to a far greater extent from within than from without. The assumption to the contrary is a rashly adopted metaphysical illusion, not an ascertained psychological truth. Kant's acceptance of it made it logically impossible for him to escape from a phenomenalism practically as agnostic as the scepticism of Hume by the introduction of any elaborating machinery of forms, categories, and ideals. That he, nevertheless, combated agnostic phenomenalism with ingenuity and profundity is also a fact, and one which non-agnostics will gladly acknowledge; but even a happy inconsistency is an inconsistency, and every inconsistency is a weakness. The hypothesis of the "Ding an sich" is itself so nebulous and ambiguous as rather to increase than remove or lessen the self-contradictoriness of the general theory.

3. I have previously indicated why I regard Kant's account of "the forms of the sensory"—space and time—as largely erroneous; his opinion that he either removed the metaphysical difficulties connected with them by arguing that they are *only* necessary conditions of phenomena, or warded off scepticism by maintaining that they *are* necessary conditions, as

<sup>1</sup> *Institutes of Metaphysics*, pp. 276-282.

## SENSE AND UNDERSTANDING

not well founded; and what he called his "Critical Idealism," as far from exempt from the faults which he himself charged on other forms of idealism. Here I would add that the only reason which he has given for regarding the whole matter or content of experience as derived from impressions of sense—namely, that the categories of the understanding are only applicable to the objects of which we gain experience through sense—is one which is not substantiated by any evidence. In reality, the categories are just as applicable to internal states as to external phenomena. Mind, in all its phases and processes, so far as these are consciously realised, is not less capable of being thought in the pure immediate cognitions of relation which Kant terms categories than Matter and its phenomena. Mind *per se*, in the Kantian sense, of course cannot, but neither can Matter *per se*.

4. Objection must be taken both to Kant's mode of separating and of connecting sense and understanding. There can no more be perception without the categories of the understanding than without the forms of sense. The former are not merely *superimposed on perceptions in order to transform them into notions*; they are *implied in their existence and even in their very possibility as perceptions*. The so-called *forms* themselves presuppose the so-called *categories*. Space cannot be apprehended or thought of as other than *quantitative, relative* (to its own parts or to other things), *real*, and *necessary*; in other words, except as presupposing the categories which it is represented as preceding and conditioning. Kant's sepa-



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ration of sense and understanding, and of the forms of the one and the categories of the other, is psychologically unnatural and exaggerated. It is of a one-sidedness and rigidity altogether mechanical. His way of connecting them is equally mechanical, equally of a kind inappropriate to spirit. Hegel sarcastically, yet correctly, described it as "such an external and superficial union as when a piece of wood and a leg are bound together by a cord."

5. According to Kant sense is essentially passive and understanding essentially active. In thinking so he was, I believe, mistaken. Wholly passive eyes, ears, and finger-tips, if they see, hear, or feel at all, assuredly see, hear, and feel very little. In order to be media of information the senses must be largely active and operative. The understanding, on the other hand, is not essentially self-active. It must more or less passively receive its matter or content, and be acted on thereby. It is the self alone which is self-active. The understanding is only active in so far as it is actively exercised by the self. Were it essentially self-active, however, sense must be so too, inasmuch as every sense-perception includes a judgment, an act of understanding.

6. Kant's identification of the understanding with judgment has been allowed to pass almost (not entirely) uncriticised. His distribution of judgments into analytic and synthetic, on the other hand, has been much controverted, especially during recent years, with the result that the logic of judgment is far from the point at which it was when Kant wrote,

## THE UNDERSTANDING AND JUDGMENT

without his doctrine of knowledge being, perhaps, greatly affected. He was certainly not happy in his choice of instances of synthetic judgments. Philosophical speculation was immensely and beneficially influenced by his doctrine of the categories. But that it was far from being a satisfactory doctrine is now almost universally recognised. The procedure by which the categories were obtained was perfunctory; and the enumeration, classification, and correlation of them are all liable to obvious objections. Any real "deduction" of them was manifestly impossible if they really were the primary and ultimate modes of judgment which Kant represented them to be. The conclusion of the so-called "deduction" which is given is a conclusion of the very kind which Kant labours to prove must be of its very nature unprovable; a metaphysical conclusion such as he professes to show lies beyond the reach of all possible knowledge.

7. The reason which Kant gave for concluding that the categories must be applicable to the phenomena of sense—namely, that otherwise there would be no orderly, definite, universal experience, and consequently no intelligibility in experience—was an obvious *petitio principii*, when employed as the basis of an argument against a scepticism like that of Hume, which professed to have logically reached the conclusion that there, in reality, was no intelligibility in experience, and no room for ascribing any more to it than such an illusory appearance of order and objectivity as associations of custom and contingency may produce. He failed carefully to discuss the

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question, Can pure *a priori* notions be reasonably supposed to operate on, and to transform and elevate into intelligibility, such confused and chaotic matter as sense-impressions derived from no known or knowable what or where? Must it not be as unwarranted to bring the categories into connection with such perceptions as into connection with things-in-themselves? One of the earliest and acutest of Kant's critics, Solomon Maimon, conclusively showed, I think, that here was a fatally weak point in the Kantian theory; and that, on Kant's own principles, the sphere of knowledge should have been limited to mathematics, and all objective validity and intelligibility denied to the contents of sense, seeing that in them there is no necessity, no universality, nor affinity of any kind to the categories of thought. Maimon did not oppose to the criticism of Kant the scepticism which he himself professed. What he did was to maintain that his scepticism was the only true basis of the criticism at which Kant aimed but failed to reach; that not merely *the forms* but also *the objects* of knowledge must be *a priori* in us if we are to be entitled to ascribe to them objective validity, seeing that objects cannot be generated by thought in the empirical as in the mathematical sphere. His argumentation, it appears to me, was incontrovertible.

8. Kant erred in referring all universality and necessity in cognition to an *a priori and subjective origin*. It was an error which naturally followed from his assumption that the content of knowledge consists wholly of particular and contingent sense-

## VALUE OF KANT'S LABOURS

perceptions. That left him without any other defence against the most absolute scepticism than what he could find in *the ego alone*. Hence he toiled so earnestly to find in the forms and categories of thought the grounds of assurance in a real validity of knowledge and an at least apparent objectivity in things. His labour was certainly not in vain. It showed more convincingly and comprehensively than had ever been done before how much more is implied even in a knowledge of objects of sense than mere sensations; and in that way and to that extent it effected a satisfactory refutation of sensism and of the scepticism which depends on it. It was also, however, labour which, instead of confirming, virtually disproved the assumption on which it proceeded—the empiricist assumption that the subject and object in cognition are not organically one but mechanically distinct. The chief value of Kant's elaborate process of investigation and argumentation really lies, paradoxical as the statement may appear, in its being a continuous course of self-refutation. The great conclusion to be drawn from it is not the one which was expressed, but one which is throughout suggested to us by it—namely, the truth that knowledge is a process in which subject and object so correspond, reciprocate, and harmonise that each is only known in, and through the other, and in which what Kant called forms of sense and categories of judgment are simply constitutive conditions of intelligence in virtue of which the knowing subject is able directly and truly to apprehend what actually and truly exists in known

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objects. The phenomenalism and representationism of Kant caused him to ignore that truth, but his tremendous yet fruitless efforts to vindicate the validity or show the possibility of knowledge without the acceptance of it are, perhaps, more instructive and conclusive than his advocacy of it would have been.

9. I shall merely add that Kant in his criticism of knowledge should surely have introduced "the synthetic unity of apperception" at a much earlier stage than he did. It is not the cope-stone but the corner-stone of a theory of knowledge, being essential to the very existence and conceivability of knowledge; and the theory of knowledge, as of everything else, should begin with what is primary and fundamental. If Kant had paid due regard to the fact that cognition is in no form or stage conceivable otherwise than as a synthetic act of a self-active subject, he would not have started on an inquiry into the possibility and conditions of knowledge by positing *unknowables*,—with which a theory of knowledge can have nothing to do,—and *appearances*—of what does not appear;—nor would he have separated in the abstract and mechanical way which he did *noumena and phenomena, matter and form, sense and understanding, experience and reason, knowledge and reality, the sensuous and suprasensuous*.

### § III. TRANSCENDENTAL LOGIC: (B) DIALECTIC

In passing from *Transcendental Analytic* to *Transcendental Dialectic* Kant passes from the second to

## KANT'S TRANSCENDENTAL DIALECTIC

the third intellectual faculty, *from the understanding to the reason*, taken not in the general sense in which Kant sometimes employs it but in its restricted and distinctive sense. In this latter sense reason, according to Kant, is the faculty which reduces judgment to unity in virtue of its continually striving to rise above the domain of experience, the sphere of sense, to the suprasensuous and unconditioned. As sense manifests itself in perceptions, and understanding in judgments, so does reason in *conclusions*. As sense has its forms, and understanding its categories, so has reason its *ideas*. As the perceptions of sense can only be made subjects of intelligence through the activity of the understanding, so can the axioms of the understanding only be reduced to unity through the operation of the reason.

Reason,—the faculty of the unconditioned, the infinite, the absolute,—has, according to Kant, *three ideas*; and, just as he had derived the categories of the understanding from the twelve kinds of judgment, so he derives the ideas of reason from *the three forms of the syllogism*,—the categorical, the hypothetical, and the disjunctive. The three ideas are the Soul, the World, and God. And on each of them, he holds, there has been built up by the reason a metaphysical system of doctrine erroneously claiming to be a science: on the idea of the absolute unity of the thinking subject, the soul, the so-called science of Rational Psychology; on the idea of the absolute totality of phenomena, the universe, the so-called science of Rational Cosmology; and on the ideal of absolute



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reality, God, the so-called science of Rational Theology.

That reason, taken in its distinctive sense, possesses those ideas, means, according to Kant, that the mind from the very nature of its intellectual constitution necessarily assumes the unity of the soul, the existence of the universe, and the reality of a First Cause. At the same time, he maintains that those assumptions, although necessary assumptions, are merely assumptions, and not to be accepted as positive truths or to have any objective value assigned to them. We necessarily seem, he thinks, to know what reason compels us to believe, and are inevitably led to credit its conclusions and to ascribe validity to its arguments; but, in reality, we *do not know* what we necessarily seem to know and cannot but believe, and the conclusions of reason are all, in fact, *illusions*, and its arguments are all, to use his own words, "*as regards their result, rather to be termed sophisms than syllogisms, although indeed as regards their origin they are very well entitled to the latter name, inasmuch as they are not fictions or accidental products of reason, but are necessitated by its very nature,—sophisms not of men, but of pure reason itself, from which the wisest cannot free himself.*"

While Kant represents reason—pure reason—as an essentially illusory faculty, he does not admit it to be, as Sir William Hamilton affirms, "an organ of mere delusion." He expressly denies it to be essentially delusive, and maintains that it only becomes a

## ILLUSIONS AND DELUSIONS

source of fallacies and deceptions when not confined to its legitimate sphere. He says in express terms "it must be the mere abuse of the ideas of reason which cause them to generate in our minds a deceptive appearance;" and often repeats the statement in substance. He distinguishes between *illusions* and *delusions*, and attributes only the former to the natural operation of reason. The illusions of reason, he affirms, although they cannot be prevented from arising, can be detected and prevented from imposing on us. They are, he contends, *like the illusions of sense*. The moon near the horizon seems larger than when overhead. This is an illusion of perception which cannot be got rid of but which can be detected, so that it does not mislead or prove our senses to be deceptive and mendacious. Nor is reason, according to Kant, without a legitimate and useful function. On the contrary, he holds that its ideas have a valuable regulative purpose. They call forth and urge on empirical inquiry; and although they impel men to search for the undiscoverable, the unknowable, the energy and the efforts thus elicited greatly contribute to the extension and organising of human knowledge.

The general view taken of reason by Kant has now been stated. Is it a rational one, or has Kant justified it? I answer in the negative, and on such grounds as the following:—

1. The very conception of a special faculty for the production of inevitable illusions is a most unnatural and improbable one. Is there any other faculty of

the kind in the world either of beasts or of men? Is it not so abnormal and absurd a sort of power as to have a strong *primâ facie* evidence against the assumption of its existence? There is no other mental faculty *merely of illusions*. There is no other faculty of *necessary and constitutional illusions*. The so-called illusions of sense are casual or easily explicable, and most unlike those ascribed by Kant to reason. It would be a violation of the laws of optics, a continuous and needless miracle, were the moon *not* to appear larger on the horizon than when overhead. Obviously Kant required to prove that human knowledge could only be unified and systematised by an exclusively and inevitably illusory faculty; that sense, understanding, and imagination with its idealising power, impelled by curiosity and the wants of practical life, and controlled and directed by enlightened and energetic will, would not have sufficed for the purpose. But that he failed to do. Looked at from a teleological point of view, the pure reason of Kant is plainly an anomaly in the universe. According to his own description of it, it is a power which strives to rise above experience and to rest in the unconditioned, or, in other words, one the aim of which is essentially unattainable, the objects of which can never be discovered to correspond to anything real. Now, we know of no power like that in the universe; wherever we find a natural power we find also a real and appropriate sphere for its display. The existence of any instinctive craving or constitutional tendency is itself a guarantee of the existence of due sat-

## DOCTRINE OF REASON EXAMINED

isfaction for it. If so, Kant had, of course, no right to posit or postulate such a reason as that which he called pure reason.

2. The utility of what Kant calls pure reason is not satisfactorily established by him. Let us grant all that he has said in its favour. Let us grant that it gives greater unity and completeness to our knowledge, and let us estimate the advantage of that as high as we reasonably can. Has it not, however, disadvantages? Are there not evils which flow naturally and necessarily from its operation? Yes, and on Kant's own showing, those disadvantages and evils are numerous and enormous. They comprehend all sorts of superstitions and aberrations, all false religions and all false philosophies. Can the good ascribed to pure reason be fairly held to counterbalance or even to equal such a mass of evil?

3. There are serious intrinsic defects in Kant's doctrine of reason which take away from its credibility: (*a*) For example, it is only as a faculty, not indeed of delusion, but of illusion, that pure reason is, even according to Kant's account, of any use. Its influence within what he calls its legitimate sphere is due entirely to its operation within what he calls its illegitimate sphere. It is in virtue of the assumption that it possesses what it does not possess, the principles of a knowledge of the unconditioned, that it performs the work on the conditioned which is alone of value. (*b*) Again, the very existence of pure reason as a faculty depends, according to Kant's view of it, on the illusions which it entertains. Remove them

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and you destroy the reason itself. Thoroughly convince a man that he can know only the conditioned, which is all according to Kant that he really can know, and reason must vanish along with the illusion of the unconditioned. From that time onward sense and understanding must be the only cognitive powers of that man's mind. (c) And further, what Kant speaks of as the illegitimate sphere of reason is, in reality, and also according to his own account, its only proper sphere. Reason in its distinctive sense as described by himself is only reason when it operates on and with ideas of the unconditioned, or, in other words, with ideas which are illusions and out of which only illusions can be evolved. Its ideas promote the cause of truth only by calling forth efforts of intellect which serve to systematise and develop knowledge; but the sphere of such efforts is plainly not, as Kant says, the legitimate sphere of reason, seeing that, although they have been called forth by illusions as to the unconditioned, they must be kept free from all such illusions in order to be successful. They must be guided entirely by *principles of the conditioned* if they are to help to the apprehension of truth. To associate an idea of the reason with experience is, according to Kant's own teaching, to corrupt and destroy knowledge. In other words, the sphere which Kant is forced to assign to reason as its legitimate sphere of action because there is no other creditable one to which to assign it, belongs wholly to the understanding, and for reason there is reserved only the sphere of illusions. Such a doctrine of reason

## KANT'S PURE REASON

refutes itself by its inconsistencies, its self-contradictions.

4. The so-called pure reason of Kant is a quite imaginary faculty. The human mind has no such faculty. It was the great illusion of Kant to suppose that it had. Reason is the faculty of all intuition proper, or of all that is necessary and universal either in perceptive or intellectual cognition. It has no such ideas exclusively inherent in it, however, as the soul, the world, and God. These are the three fundamental objects of thought, the three great realities to which all human knowledge is related. They are not properly speaking either mere ideas or mere ideals. We may, indeed, speak of God as *the idea of ideas, the ideal of ideals*, but only intelligently when we then also think of Him as the *ens realissimum*, the source of all existence and energy, truth and goodness. As mere ideas the soul, world, and God are empty notions. Individuals may have fancied that they had one or other or all of these so-called ideas through a transcendent act of a special faculty apart from all experience, but the fancies of a few confused metaphysicians should not be charged upon the reason itself. The so-called ideas of the so-called pure reason of Kant are none of them original elements or first principles of the reason which is really a faculty of the human mind. They are none of them attained independently of experience but in and through experience. The vast majority of psychologists, cosmologists, and theologians have been under no such delusion as that they could raise sciences on



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their mere intuitive ideas of the soul, the world, and God.

Owing to Kant having conceived of pure or speculative reason in the way which he did, his criticism of it is not really a criticism of human reason or of any truly reasonable kind of philosophy, but mainly of Wolfian rationalism, and unfortunately, also a criticism which proceeds to a large extent on the erroneous principles of that form of rationalism.

As I have already said, Kant assigns to reason three ideas and represents it as raising up on each of them a pretended science,—on the idea of *the soul Rational Psychology*, on the idea of *the world Rational Cosmology*, and on the idea of *God Rational Theology*. He further maintains that in the erection of these speculative structures reason employs as many kinds of inherently vicious *arguments* as it has *ideas*—namely, *paralogisms* which relate to *the psychological idea*, *antinomies* which relate to *the cosmological idea*, and *ideals* which relate to *the theological idea*. To exhibit and expose these paralogisms, antinomies, and ideals, and to destroy the doctrines or systems with which they are associated, is the task which he endeavours to accomplish in his *Transcendental Dialectic*.

I. Rational Psychology. Kant undertakes first to show the futility of the inferences as to the nature of the soul which have been drawn from the characteristics of consciousness. He finds them all to be vitiated by *confounding a merely logical subject with*

## KANT'S RATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

*a real thing*, and so to be paralogisms, or unconscious sophisms.

The root of all mental action is represented by him as being the conscious judgment *I think*. This *I think* is the expression of pure consciousness, its primary form, and it unifies and renders possible all experience. Wherever thought or consciousness is, there is immediately felt to be an *I* which is (1) a determining subject, (2) simple, (3) self-identical amidst all the variety of mental states, and (4) distinct from all objects external to itself. It is on this basis that Rational Psychology is raised, and the way in which it is raised is, according to Kant, the conversion of the characteristics of the act through which consciousness is realised into ontological predicates, and so making of the mere feeling or conception of conscious unity a real soul, a substance, a simple substance, a spiritual substance, an indestructible or immortal substance, and the like, all of which dogmas are due to transforming the determinations of a merely phenomenal subject into the properties of a transcendental object, and bring the same terms self or soul to denote two entirely distinct entities, a subjective and an objective, a logical and a real, ego. Hence all the alleged proofs of a soul or spirit include a *quaternio terminorum*. In fact, the existence of a soul or spirit, self or ego, distinct from the body or more than a feeling of the unity of consciousness, cannot possibly be either proved or disproved.

The criticism of Kant in this portion of his "Transcendental Dialectic" was not without consid-

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erable relevancy against a sort of psychology prevalent in Germany when he wrote, although even then falling into discredit. It was so far effective against the "Rational Psychology" of Wolf and his followers. And yet it proceeded throughout on the position of a dualism akin to, and at least as irrational as, the dualism which was Wolf's radical error. It assumed *two* "egos," one a logical subject and the other a real thing, and *two* "psychologies," one rational and the other empirical, one a pseudo-science and the other a true science. That, however, was an assumption which begged everything, and which Kant had no right to make. It has received no confirmation from himself or from others. His subjective "ego," his merely logical subject, is *a figment of abstraction to which nothing corresponds*, and his unknowable ontological "ego" is *another of the same*. There is in man but a single *ego*, and that *ego* is neither of those imagined by Kant, but a real, living, self-perceptive, and self-active agent. It is the *ego* alike of conscious experience and of true psychological science. There are not *two* "psychologies." Wolf and Kant both erred in supposing that there were. The Kantian form of the error is no improvement on the Wolfian. Unsatisfactory as may be the notion of a really "rational psychology" distinct from empirical psychology, the notion of a necessarily illusory one distinct from it must surely be as unsatisfactory. Both notions are, however, forms of the same error, and have been arguments have precisely the same defects as those supported by the same kind of reasoning. Kant's

## KANT'S TREATMENT OF SENSE

which he condemned—namely, a word used in a double sense, and in each syllogism a *quaternio terminorum*. The difference between them and those he assailed lay not in their character but in their application. His criticism should have been applied not only to Wolfian rationalism in regard to the soul but to his own critical doctrine also. Or, as Hegel puts it, “he fell into contradiction from the barbarity of the conceptions which he refutes, and the barbarity of those which he retains from among those that are refuted.”

He adhered, however, only too consistently to the most fatally erroneous of his principles, denial to the mind of true perceptive power or immediate apprehension of reality. He began his “Critique” by treating sense as a mere receptacle of impressions, needing to be somehow organised and objectified by mental forms and categories, but the causes of which, if they have causes, are not causes or objects really perceived, but, on the contrary, imperceptible and unknowable. Having begun by thus misrepresenting the testimony of consciousness and sense-perception, it was just what was to be expected that he would treat the testimony of self-consciousness and introspection in the same way. Had he allowed that his *phenomenal ego* was apprehended as an actual self, as more than a feeling or conception to which no real self corresponds, he would have been manifestly inconsistent. And to what could it on his view correspond? Certainly not to his *transcendental ego*, for that, if there be any such thing, must be a “thing-

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in-itself," and unknowable. Such inconsistency he cannot be charged with. He concedes to what we call self-consciousness no intuition of self or genuine knowledge of self as a reality. He represents the ego as being for consciousness a mere feeling of activity ultimately referring to a conception of unity. There is nothing more in it, according to his view, than the feeling and conception. But he thereby rejected the testimony of consciousness at its clearest, and logically involved himself in a scepticism the most absolute, from which he had to try to deliver himself by *faith*, a faith irreconcilable with his critical philosophy. The truth of truths as to knowledge is the one so ingeniously and eloquently expounded and applied by Ferrier in his *Institutes of Metaphysics*,—the truth that, along with whatever is known, *self or the ego* is also and necessarily known. This knowledge of self inseparable from all knowledge whatsoever, the condition of all human experience, the source of psychology, and the corner-stone of epistemology, is a knowledge at once real and relative. Kant went so far as to try to show that being always relative to objects it could not be itself knowledge of reality, but his attempt was feeble in the extreme, and fairly deserved Hegel's sarcasm that it amounted to maintaining that a man cannot know *himself* because he cannot take his *self*, his *ego*, in his hands, and see it, and smell it.

II. Rational Cosmology. In this section of *Transcendental Dialectic*, Kant endeavours to show that reason founding on *the idea of the universe*—i.e., of

## KANT'S RATIONAL COSMOLOGY

the absolute totality of phenomena—and seeking to comprehend the world as unconditioned, necessarily builds up a pseudo-science like that rested on the idea of the soul. In the latter, reason had been shown, he held, to involve itself in paralogisms. When occupied speculatively with the universe it leads, he argues, to *antinomies* or *dilemmas* which can neither be evaded nor dogmatically solved. Of these there are neither more nor less than four, because there are just so many leading categories of the understanding, and each of them is extensible beyond experience. Hence, in *quantity* the world is either bounded by a limit in time and space or unbounded; in *quality* it is either ultimately simple or infinitely divisible; in *relation* it is either caused by free activity or made up of an infinite series of mechanical causes; and in *modality* it has either an independent cause or is composed of mutually dependent members. These are Kant's famous *antinomies*. And he not only maintains that the antithetic positions may in each case be equally demonstrated, but shows us how it may be done. In other words, he gives us what he professes to be equally good and complete demonstrations for holding *both* that the world *had and had not a beginning in time*; *both* that it is *ultimately simple and infinitely divisible*; *both* that it is produced by *free agency and by an infinite series of necessitated antecedents*; and *both subject to and exempt from the condition of causality*.

Were he correct, reason would seem to be left in a very desperate plight. If all its attempts to under-



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stand the universe result in contradictory yet equally well-established conclusions, it would itself appear to be essentially self-contradictory and doomed to absolute scepticism. But Kant thought otherwise. He professed, and quite sincerely, to be no sceptic. So, as in duty bound, he undertook to show to reason a way of escape and deliverance, or, in other words, to solve its dilemmas and dispel its antinomies. And he was right in so proceeding, instead of accepting, as Sir William Hamilton, Mansel, and others have done, the antinomies as expressions of a fundamental law of thought, and making no attempt to solve them, but letting *faith* decide for the term which pleases it, although there is as much reason in favour of the other. Kant was neither so naïve nor so arbitrary as that. He professed not only to demonstrate but to *solve the antinomies*, and to solve them *critically*, i.e., in accordance with the principles of his own theoretical philosophy.

What is his so-called *critical* solution? It is an application of his distinction between phenomena and things-in-themselves. The antinomies of reason, he affirms, necessarily arise from our inveterate habit of confounding our own laws of thought with independent existence. If things-in-themselves be subjected to the dilemmas raised by reason, absolute scepticism is inevitable. But, according to Kant, it is just in thinking so that our error lies. What is true of the empirical or phenomenal world may not apply to the transcendental or intelligible (noumenal) world. A totality in our conceptions is not to

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be identified with a totality of things-in-themselves. The objects which we know in experience are not things-in-themselves, but exist for us only as they appear to us in experience. Hence we have no right to affirm anything of them in themselves; no right, for example, to affirm either that the world is in itself finitely or infinitely extended, for the world in itself is not a world that we know, and the world we know is one which exists only in an experience that is always extending but never completed, so that we can neither pronounce the extension of it finite nor infinite. If, however, we thus distinguish between the worlds of existence and of experience, of noumena and of phenomena, and recognise that what is true of the latter need not be true of the former, and that, indeed, thought ceases to be valid beyond experience and phenomena, we may fairly hold ourselves entitled to reject both the theses and the antitheses of the first two antinomies, and to accept the theses of the two last as true of the noumenal world and the antitheses as true of the phenomenal world.

Such is Kant's solution of the antinomies of "Rational Psychology." Now, any solution is, as I have said, better than none. And Kant's must be admitted to be ingenious, and also to have actually proved fruitfully suggestive. Regarded from a logical point of view, however, it is thoroughly futile. There is only one world or universe—the phenomenal world—the universe of real or possible experience. All Kant's antinomies relate only to it. The question whether the so-called transcendental or intelligible

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world, the Kantian "world-in-itself," is finitely or infinitely extended, is a question which cannot be intelligently put or sanely answered in any definite way. Nothing, not even existence, can be attributed to an absolutely unknown and unknowable world. Kant, seeing that he lectured and wrote regarding it, should have had some real thought of it and belief in it; but it is quite certain he had none, nor has any other person had, notwithstanding all that has been talked and printed concerning it. Inasmuch as all knowing of anything is the knowing of it not *out of* but *in* relation to a knowing self, no finite or even infinite intelligence can be supposed to know any "thing-in-itself." Indeed, a "thing-in-itself" is not only what no intelligence can know but what no intelligence can be ignorant of, for, as Ferrier has well shown, "we can be ignorant only of what can possibly be known; in other words, there can be an ignorance only of that of which there can be a knowledge."<sup>1</sup> A "thing" or "world" "in-itself" is as utterly nonsensical as a whole which is smaller than any of its parts. An infinite intelligence seeing the universe through and through could no more have a glimpse of the Kantian so-called "intelligible world" than the dullest human or even animal intelligence. To refer us in any way to such a world as a key to the solution of the antinomies of reason is certainly not to give us any help.

The merit of Kant as regards what are termed antinomies of reason lay not in resolving them but in

<sup>1</sup> *Institutes of Metaphysics*, 404-408.

## THE ANTINOMIES EXAMINED

calling, or rather recalling, attention to them. His whole treatment of them was hazy and superficial. He *dogmatically* assigned them to a particular source instead of *critically* inquiring what their source was. He did not discuss the important questions as to whether or not, or to what extent, they are natural and necessary perplexities of reason itself or the artificial puzzles of a misapplied metaphysical ingenuity. He arbitrarily assumed them to be confined to a special faculty and a particular pseudo-science, although they are also to be found in logic, mathematics, dynamics, ethics, &c. He made no general survey of them; nor did he show that in any instance both terms of an antinomy really appear to have equal claims to acceptance where a synthesis is not only possible but logically demanded. All the antinomies specified by Kant are pervaded by one fundamental antithesis of which only one term is reasonable or provable. One or other or both of his "demonstrations" will be found to be illogical. How he could have fancied, for example, the verbiage attached to the second proposition of his first antinomy a "demonstration" is most amazing. Then, the first proposition of his second antinomy is a truism, while the second is a paradox, and the whole antinomy is so feebly and confusedly dealt with that it is difficult to make out what was aimed at. There is no real contradiction involved in the third antinomy, and no proof whatever is given that there is not room in the universe for both freedom and necessity. In the fourth antinomy the antithetic proposition is absurd, and all that Kant says in

support of it merely tends to show that the idea of Necessary Being is not distinct and definite like a perception of sense or a mathematical figure, which is, of course, irrelevant to what he required to prove. In short, he has in no wise made out that reason in theorising on the universe necessarily falls into self-contradiction, and has made it apparent that his belief in its self-contradictoriness arose largely from the irrational separation of phenomenal and noumenal by which he pretended to solve the imaginary contradictions which he ascribed to it. His attempt to do so has been well characterised by Wundt (Log. ii. 376) as a "*Scheingefecht*."

III. Rational Theology. This is, according to Kant, the pseudo-science based on the third idea of pure reason, the highest of its ideas, and therefore, in order to distinguish it from the other ideas, often called by him an *ideal*. It is the idea or ideal of the totality of possibility, of reality, and of perfection, inclusive of individuality and personality, or, in a word, the idea or ideal of God. It originates, he holds, so far as it can be traced to the pure or speculative reason, and, indeed, so far as it can be traced to intelligence at all, in the form of the disjunctive syllogism,—a form which implies the determinability of a thing to the totality of all possible predicates. To know anything completely it is necessary for reason to have the idea of the whole of possible, real, and perfect being, and to determine the thing thereby negatively or positively. Further, reason cannot content itself with entertaining the idea as a merely regulative

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principle of thought, but must go on to objectify, hypostatise, and personify it, and to build up on it a system of dogmas, although it is a mere subjective conception without any real basis or content. Hence belief in the existence of an Absolute and Perfect Being,—faith in God, so far as founded on reason, is a dialectical illusion.

Such is Kant's view of the rational idea or ideal of God. It is, unquestionably, an ingenious one. I am not aware that any person before him had the thought of tracing the belief in God to the form of the disjunctive syllogism as its source. Only a very subtle and speculative individual, of a decidedly scholastic turn of mind, would have dreamed of so curious and abstruse an explanation of a universal belief which probably no man who entertained it had ever before rested on the ground indicated. The view was, further, as consistent as it was ingenious. It was just the view which Kant's system, and especially his theory of the faculties and functions of cognition, demanded. If his plan of the speculative reason were correct the origin of the belief in God could not be found among the forms of sense or the categories of the understanding, but only in the operations of the ideas of reason; not in the region of perceptions or of judgments but only of syllogisms. He found it where he was logically bound to find it.

Ingenuity and consistency, however, are the only merits which we can justly attribute to his hypothesis, and even they seem to deserve but slight admiration. The ingenuity should of itself suggest suspi-



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cion. A belief like the belief in God cannot have had the extremely artificial origin which Kant assigns to it. Its real source must be sought for in the reasons which have actually given rise to it in the conscious experience of the race and made its history what we know it to have been. Among such reasons the one alleged by Kant had certainly no place. Unless unduly influenced by scholastic habits of thought, he could not have assigned to the disjunctive syllogism the part which he did in the origination of the idea of God. His consistency was maintained by the sacrifice of naturalness and truth.

The point of view, then, from which he criticised "Rational Theology" was highly dubious. His conceptions, I must add, of the nature of what are called the proofs for the Divine existence were very defective. He regarded them not as the indications of real processes of knowing by which religious experience is attained and extended, but as formal syllogisms, each of which must determine in itself whether or not a conclusion is true and certain. But that is an erroneous assumption, a scholastic prejudice which has found its contradiction in the whole history of modern science. Any criticism of the theistic proofs founded on so inaccurate a conception of their character cannot fail, however acute and subtle it may be, to be in the main inconclusive. Were the proofs of positive and inductive science exhibited and criticised in the same abstract and artificial manner as were the proofs of Natural or Rational Theology by Kant, they would fare just as badly. They actually

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were so criticised in the Middle Ages, and the result was that there was almost no positive or inductive science in those ages. The world and man were most superficially known because most unwisely studied. Were geologists, biologists, or psychologists required to set forth the proofs of their conclusions in formal syllogistic processes they must abandon their occupations. Reason reaches a knowledge of God in essentially the same way as it requires a knowledge of the other great ultimate realities. No object is known to us otherwise than through acquaintance with its qualities or attributes, its powers and manifestations.

The dialectical illusion which, according to Kant, originates in the form of the disjunctive syllogism, he represents as requiring to support itself by three arguments—called respectively the Ontological, the Cosmological, and the Physico-Theological—the only three, he maintains, that can be employed by speculative reason to prove the existence of God. To the refutation of these arguments he devotes a very interesting and important portion of his “*Transcendental Dialectic*.” The objections urged in it against the theistic proofs, although in no instance original, are well selected and well presented. They are the strongest of the objections that have been urged against the three proofs, which are alone subjected to scrutiny. None of them are devoid of a considerable measure of plausibility or relevancy. They are stated clearly, effectively, and in an order which had at least the merit of being the one most suited to attain the end Kant had in view. And, further, they are essential

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portions of one of the greatest of philosophical systems, and occupy in it a distinct and highly important position. It is, therefore, perhaps not surprising that during the period when the influence of Kant was at its height his criticism of the theistic proofs should have been widely regarded as decisive. That time has now largely passed away, and those who still believe so may not uncharitably be regarded as belated thinkers or very uncritical critics. Yet much even of contemporary agnosticism, both of a popular and of a so-called scientific kind, rests largely on an untested assumption of the validity of Kant's criticism of Rational Theology; and hence to indicate the grounds on which the assumption may be questioned is still by no means superfluous.

1. *The ontological argument.*—(a) Kant treats as such what is only one of a class of the so-called *a priori* theistic proofs. Hence his refutation of it, even if successful, would not be a disproof of *a priori*, or even of ontological theistic argumentation in general. It has no reference at all even to the class of *a priori* proofs best entitled to be called *ontological*, inasmuch as they start not from the affirmation of an idea but from the affirmation of existence—the affirmation that *something* (anything) *is*, and that that of itself implies that *nothing never was, and eternal and necessary being has ever been*. It is to be regretted that Kant wholly ignored such arguments, as reflection on them might have at least led him so far into “the Parmenidean way of truth” as to meditate on the significance of *It is*, until he recognised the

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defectiveness of his conceptions of *existential judgments*, and the rashness of asserting that *is* “is always *merely the copula of a judgment.*”

(b) The so-called ontological argument discussed—one of the Cartesian forms of *a priori* theistic proof—is taken up by Kant first on the ground that, although it has appeared much later than the other two arguments to be examined, it is presupposed by them. That ground, however, is a false assumption. The argument in question is not first in the natural order of the theistic proofs. Those proofs represent stages of a process of which the last is the apprehension of God as the all-perfect Being. Hegel saw this, and properly placed the ontological argument last, although he erroneously treated the other arguments as merely untrue forms of the ontological, which, therefore, had to establish the truth of the entire thought of God. The argument criticised by Kant proceeds from the idea of an all-perfect Being. But to arrive at such an idea, the elements of it, the perfections included in it—power, wisdom, goodness, righteousness—must surely have been cognised or believed in as attributes of the Divine. And they could only be cognised or believed in by some such modes of apprehension or inference as are designated the cosmological, physico-theological, or moral proofs. To the extent that God is known in any of these ways He is known as existing. All theistic proofs are proofs of God's existence. There is no more need to begin in theology with an ontological proof, merely to prove the existence of God, than there is need to commence

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the study of geology or botany with an ontological proof of the existence of stones or plants. It admirably suited Kant's purpose, however, to begin as he did. If he could make it appear at the outset that ideas of their very nature cannot imply existence, he would only require to affirm it all through to the end of his argumentation in order to save himself much logical labour. Certain it is that his whole criticism is an attempt to cut the connection between thought and existence at the point where it seems to be thinnest.

(c) I do not admit that he succeeded in his attempt. On the contrary, his criticism of the ontological argument itself seems to me futile in consequence of his assumption that thought and existence are essentially separate, so that even necessary thinking of a being as necessarily existing is no assurance of its existence. The assumption was a natural consequence of the incoherent idealism and arbitrary dualism which are the chief defects of his philosophy. Solid foundation for it there is none; no ground for believing that there is any such chasm between thought and existence, reason and reality, as is affirmed. On the contrary, there can be no genuine thinking which is not a thinking of the existent, no reasonableness except in so far as reason apprehends reality. Mere conceiving is not properly thinking; mere imagining is neither reason nor reasoning. According to Kant's own express teaching, we must necessarily, by the very constitution of our reason, not only think of God, but think of Him as necessarily self-existing, as otherwise

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we do not think of Him at all. And yet he maintains that the existence of God cannot be inferred from the necessary thought of His necessary existence, seeing that "existence cannot be clawed out of thought." Were that really so, all affirmations of existence would be unwarranted. If the transition to existence from the necessary thought of necessary existence be denied, much more must transition from particular perceptions to contingent existences be denied to us. If self-contradiction be a law of necessary thinking, all thinking may be self-contradictory, all reasoning irrational. The argument of Descartes may be valid or the reverse, but Kant's criticism of it is a suicidal sort of reasoning, an argument for absolute scepticism.

(d) As to that portion of Kant's criticism of the ontological argument which takes for granted the possibility of annulling the subject even of necessary thinking, it, too, implies that necessary thinking may not be necessary and may be unveracious, and does so dogmatically and without evidence. It also, therefore, has to be regarded as a *petitio principii* in favour of agnosticism.

2. *The cosmological argument* is naturally the first in order of the theistic proofs. The Divine has everywhere been first recognised as *power*. Hence the argument made its earliest appearance not with the first man who formulated it but with the first man who, in the presence of natural phenomena, saw in them manifestations which he felt constrained to refer to a supernatural power or powers, to a deity or deities.



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It may be as old as human reason itself, and is not in the least likely to be ever separated from it. It has been, however, always so far changing in form, and will doubtless continue so to change, as what it rests on is man's entire knowledge of the world in whatever ways gained, and that is an always widening and varying knowledge.

Kant pronounces the argument "a perfect nest of dialectical assumptions" (*ein ganzes Nest von dialektischen Anmaassungen*); but the words are really a good description not of the argument but of his own criticism of it. His objections proceed almost entirely from erroneous assumptions as to causality, necessity, and experience. I must be content with a very brief statement of my reasons for thinking so.

(a) His first, and perhaps chief objection to the argument is that it illegitimately passes by means of the principle of causality from experience to a "thing-in-itself." Causality, he affirms, cannot take us beyond experience. There is a sense in which that is true, most true. That experience extends just as far as causality and similar principles will legitimately take us is a great and precious truth. But that is not what Kant means. He means by experience sensuous experience, and would have us to believe that causality only gives order to sensuous impressions but can by no means carry us beyond them. Are there no dialectical assumptions of the most erroneous kind in such a view? Why, that conception of experience assumes the truth of sensism, and were it correct, Kant had no shadow of right to rep-

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resent causality as even subjectively necessary. In that case the agnosticism of sensism, of Hume, must be well-founded, while the agnosticism of criticism, of Kant, can have no true basis.

(b) Kant argues as if the cosmological argument represented thought as proceeding along a series of intermediate causes outside of the universe, each of which is contingent, to what it at last through sheer weariness arbitrarily pronounces a first and necessary cause. But he thereby caricatures the real process. There is no warrant for assuming intermediate causes at all. If the universe of physical things and finite minds show no traces of necessary self-existent being, and must therefore have a necessary self-existent cause out of itself, our first step of inference beyond the universe will be also the last. We know nothing, and can reasonably believe nothing, about intermediate beings between the universe and the first cause, the self-existent being, and hence we have nothing to do with them *except to show that we have nothing to do with them, and that is done wherever the argument is properly stated*. Reference to the unthinkable-ness of an infinite regress—the incredibility of an infinite series—of finite causes, is only required to show that the insertion of imaginary intermediate causes would be irrelevant and ineffective. It is not a direct or constitutive part of the argument; not employed as Kant's criticism must lead unwary readers to imagine.

(c) Another objection taken by Kant to the cosmological argument is that it treats the idea of necessity

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as a transcendental object of knowledge. He affirms that because we are under the necessity of thinking a necessary cause for the world we conclude that there is such a cause; and, of course, he tells us that we have no right so to convert a necessity of thought into a necessity of existence. But surely that does not advance the cause he pleads. It is merely a reiteration of his want of faith in the veracity of necessary thought—a want of faith, too, inconsistent with all that is positive in his own doctrine. To ascribe truth to what reason must necessarily think is perfectly legitimate. To deny to it truth implies not only the critical scepticism which Kant advocates, but the absolute scepticism which he repudiates and pretends to refute.

(*d*) A further charge of Kant against the cosmological argument is that it is only the ontological argument in disguise. It was not unnatural that he should think so, as his view of both arguments was far from clear and definite. Yet the arguments are as distinct as two arguments each representing a stage or moment in the same process can well be. They are connected and explanatory, but neither is the other in disguise. Kant's conception of the second as only a veiled form of the first is transparently erroneous, and cannot be acquiesced in by any one who recognises that the rational transition from the world as a known effect to its cause is the cosmological argument, the effectuation of the transition its distinctive and even sole function, so that when that function is accomplished its work is done, and those who wish to know

## THE PHYSICO-THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

whether the cause of the world is more than a First Cause, a self-active, all-productive Power, must contemplate the world from other standpoints than a merely cosmological, an exclusively ætiological one. Indeed, confused as Kant's own criticism is, it disproves what it claims to prove, *inasmuch as it represents the cosmological argument to have a function distinct from the ontological, although affirming, indeed, that the basis of the ontological argument is employed in the support of the cosmological argument.* Even on his own showing the distinction of the two arguments is as evident as their relationship, and the second is not the first in another name and another garb.

3. *The physico-theological argument.* In this argument the inference is from the evidences of order and purpose in the world to a divine intelligence. Kant pronounces on it a fine and celebrated eulogium. Nevertheless he declares it to be logically unsatisfactory, and urges certain objections against it, which had, however, been far more skilfully and effectively urged by Hume. Presented as they are in all their nakedness by Kant, they ought not to mislead any independent and wakeful mind.

(a) The first is that the idea of finality or design on which the argument proceeds is of subjective origin, and consequently, like that of cause, invalid when transferred from the experiential to the supra-sensible, or, in other words, when applied to a transcendental object. Here again, however, there is irrelevancy, due to confusion in Kant's own thinking.

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The argument does not imply that the idea of finality, as revealed in the universe, carries the mind to a Kantian transcendental object or Kantian thing-in-itself. None of the constitutive ideas of reason do that. The act of spiritual apprehension dependent on the principle of finality merely raises the mind to the intelligence which has displayed itself in the order and adaptations of the universe; merely brings the human mind into contact and communion with the Divine Mind, so as to enlarge and elevate its experience, while not taking it beyond experience or enabling it to know the unknowable. The principle of finality always carries us, indeed, beyond the phenomena of sense to intelligence. Intelligence in our fellow-men is no more a phenomenon of sense than intelligence in God. That finality is of subjective origin in any way which implies that it has no objective application is an untenable hypothesis—one which would require us to disbelieve not only in the existence of the Divine Mind, but of all minds.

(*b*) The second objection of Kant to the physico-theological argument, as he calls it, but which is now generally and more appropriately designated the teleological argument, is that it cannot at the utmost prove more than the existence of a world-builder of power and wisdom proportioned to the amount of order and adaptation displayed in the world; that it leads not to the idea of a creator who originates his materials, and has absolute power over them, but merely to that of an architect whose materials are given him and who shapes and combines them as

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best he can. But before making that objection, he ought manifestly to have taken into due account that the argument of which he was treating, the teleological argument, presupposed of its very nature the cosmological or ætiological argument, the express and sole purpose of which is to trace all the power and efficiency in the universe to an extra-mundane or primal Will. If he thought it did not accomplish that purpose, he should have objected to it on that account; but the objection is quite out of place when urged instead against the teleological argument, the express and sole aim of which is to show that the cause or will which is the source of all the power or efficiency in the universe is also *the intelligence or reason which accounts for all the order and harmony therein*. To object to the latter argument on the assumption that it ought not to be supported on the former, that the arguments have not distinctive yet associated functions, is not reasonable criticism, but a cavilling criticism which refuses to judge the parts of a rational process in relation to one another and to the whole.

(c) The teleological argument, Kant further objects, does not prove the Divine Intelligence to be infinite. That must be so far granted, but it is not much to the point. The questions as to the Divine infinity, absoluteness, personality, &c., do not fall to be discussed at the teleological stage of the theistic proof. They become relevant only at a later and higher stage—only when philosophical reason has ascended as high as it can without folly—only when speculative thought comes to deal with the idea of



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God as an organic and harmonious whole. The teleological argument suffices, however, to prove Divine omniscience in relation to the universe, or, in other words, that God knows all that is to be known in the universe from its centre to its farthest bounds, and in its history through all the ages of its existence. And, further, as it is of the very nature of intelligence to know itself as well as its objects, a most natural corollary from the argument is that God must not only fully know the universe He has made but also Himself, His own boundless being and blessedness, the whole of His powers and perfections. If, then, the teleological argument does not of itself prove the Divine intelligence to be infinite, it certainly gives us no warrant for supposing it limited. Kant should have stated that.

The three theistic arguments criticised by Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* were regarded by him as the only arguments which can be urged on behalf of "Rational Theology" or made use of by "theoretical reason." His examination of them led him, as we have seen, to merely negative results. The so-called arguments he maintained to be sophisms, the reputed science an illusion, the knowledge of God unattainable, and a speculative use of reason in the sphere of religion necessarily illegitimate. Yet he did not infer from those findings that he must *deny* the Divine existence or even cease to *believe* in God. Kant was no atheist. He was a believer in God and a truly religious man; and in that respect his theological followers have remained more faithful to his doc-

## ARE THERE TWO KINDS OF REASON ?

trine and are more akin to him in spirit than the specially so-called philosophical Neo-Kantists.

To vindicate the consistency of his attitude towards religion he had recourse to the distinction between theoretical and practical reason. If we cannot speculatively prove the existence of God, neither can we, he affirms, prove His non-existence. Theoretical reason is no more entitled to decide in favour of His non-existence than of His existence. Hence while criticising and rejecting the theistic proofs, it leaves it possible that a *belief* in God may reasonably originate in the practical reason. For, according to Kant, there are two sorts of reason—the theoretical and the practical. The former alone gives us knowledge, but knowledge only of the phenomena of sense. There is *no suprasensible knowledge*. There is room, however, for a *belief in God as a suprasensible reality*—for a postulating of His existence as such—capable of satisfying the requirements of duty, the wants of our nature and life. We are entitled to retain faith, although we must forego knowledge, since knowledge is only of things we see. In short, Kant insists that his criticism is not scepticism, and that it only destroys a pretendedly scientific certitude in order to clear the ground for a moral certitude such as is alone attainable within the suprasensuous sphere. Thus while he comes to the conclusion that we cannot possibly know God, he fully admits that we are bound by what he calls practical reason to believe in God.

A very few words on those views must here suffice.

1. Kant's division of reason into theoretical and

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practical is not to be accepted simply on his authority. It requires to be shown that there are *two kinds of reason*. That there are *not two kinds of reason* is a quite tenable thesis. No one will deny indeed that reason may be theoretical and practical, in the sense that it may be directed to the acquisition of knowledge and also to the attainment of practical results. But two applications of reason are not two kinds of reason; they are only reason exercised in two ways. Reason may also be said to have distinct functions—noetic, ethic, and æsthetic—according as it discriminates between the true and the false, the right and the wrong, or the beautiful and deformed. It does not follow that there are three reasons or three distinct kinds of reason, but merely that there is one and the same reason conversant with three distinct classes of relations. Kant's belief in two reasons is inseparable from his belief in two separate sorts of objects—*noumena and phenomena*. The one belief depends on the other. Both beliefs are unwarranted, and have done much mischief in philosophy.

2. Kant, when treating of "Rational Theology," did not include *the moral proof* among theistic arguments. That was only natural in one who separated theoretical and practical reason in the way which he did. But whoever examines an appropriate presentation of the moral proof must see that it is just as theoretical as the ætiological or teleological proofs. It is an argument from the manifestations of God in moral law and moral order just as they are arguments from two other forms of His self-manifestation to

## KANT'S VIEWS EXAMINED

His power and wisdom. In works published subsequently to the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant has presented a moral argument of his own, and, indeed, in two forms, a simpler and a more elaborate.<sup>1</sup> But in neither form is it a favourable specimen of its class. Admittedly it does not lead to *any real knowledge of God*. Kant affirmed, indeed, that although all other arguments for the existence of God are delusive, there is given in conscience (the practical reason) a feeling of responsibility and a sense of freedom which compel us to believe in One through whom virtue and fortune, duty and inclination, will be reconciled, and in whom the will will be free to do all that it ought. At the same time, he was too sagacious not to see that all reasoning to that effect would be met with the retort and reproach that the same process by which he pretended to have abolished the other arguments was just as applicable to his new one; that the ideas of freedom and responsibility, when appealed to in order to assure us of reality, might be as delusive as those of causation and design; that if the latter were mere forms of human thought the former might, with equal reason, be held to be so likewise, and no less incapable of affording a warrant for belief in God Himself; and consequently that the final religious result of his philosophy was not that there is a God, but merely that there is an idea of God which the human mind cannot get rid of but which it is wholly incapable of justifying or verifying. How did he meet such

<sup>1</sup> See the *Kritik der Urtheilskraft*, §§ 86-90, and *Kritik der Praktischen Vernunft*, ii. B., 2 H. v-viii.

## AGNOSTICISM OF HUME AND KANT

antagonistic criticism? He did not meet it at all. He evaded it. His reply amounted simply to re-affirming that we are under the necessity of associating the idea of a Supreme Being with the moral law, and then qualifying the statement by the admission that we can know, however, nothing about that Being, and, indeed, as soon as we try to know anything about Him, make a speculative instead of a practical use of reason, and so fall back into the realm of sophistry and illusion from which the Critical Philosophy is meant to deliver us. In other words, what he tells us is that the argument is good, but only on the conditions that it is not to be subjected to rational scrutiny and that no attempt is to be made to determine what its conclusion signifies. On those conditions might he not have found any argument good? Are such conditions not inconsistent with the whole spirit and very existence of any philosophy which claims to be *critical*?

3. Kant distinguished speculative and practical reason too sharply, and separated them too widely. They are represented by him as more exclusive and antithetic than they really are. Had he not done so he could not have conceived of God as not in some measure an object of knowledge but merely of belief; could not have failed to see that if God be inevitably thought of as morally necessary, even in the way which he himself describes, God must be to that extent really and necessarily known; not known, indeed, in the absoluteness, depths, and mysteries of His being, but known in the only way any being can be known

## “BACK TO KANT”

by men as a moral being—viz., through moral experience and moral intuition or inference. To have for belief in God as a moral being the only kind of reason appropriate for such belief is not to have merely belief in God but to have a real knowledge of God, a knowledge founded on reason and valid for reason, and not essentially distinct from so-called theoretical knowledge. Kant, in a word, by crudely contrasting theoretical and practical reason, has, of course, not succeeded in establishing any precise distinction between what he calls knowledge and belief; on the contrary, he has shown himself quite unable to maintain any of the distinctions which he has incidentally laid down between them. The fundamental affirmations of the practical reason, even as exhibited by himself, have the characteristics which he would confine to theoretical knowledge.

During the last forty years many philosophical writers have been raising the cry of “Back to Kant,” and none have done so more loudly than theological and anti-theological agnostics. The cry was far from wholly unreasonable and has been far from unproductive of good. Kant must be acknowledged to have been to recent and present philosophy, as Aristotle was to ancient and medieval and Descartes to modern philosophy, its chief fountainhead; and numerous as are the rivers and rivulets into which it has parted, all of them have owed much of what they are to what they have derived from him. We have now, and are likely to have for long, abundant reason to “go back



## AGNOSTICISM OF HUME AND KANT

to Kant," but we should certainly not go back to him in a servile and passive but in a free and critical spirit. In philosophy to call any man master is proof positive that you have no true sense of what philosophy is. "Back to Kant"—yes, but only back to him as to all great philosophical teachers. "Back to Kant"—yes, but to criticise as well as simply to imbibe; to determine what ought to be rejected and combated as well as to ascertain what should be adopted and utilised.

In dealing with Kant in the preceding pages I have gone back to him only to criticise. To have done more would have been irrelevant so far as my task is concerned. I have further criticised only those views of his on which recent agnosticism has sought to build; have challenged merely those positions of his theory of knowledge which are sceptical in tendency and have actually been largely made use of for the support of agnostic ends. I have passed no judgment on other principles or portions of his philosophical teaching, or on the developments to which they have given rise. I willingly acknowledge even that should my criticism of Kantian agnosticism be allowed to be relevant and substantially sound, agnosticism may notwithstanding be rightly held to have been enormously indebted to Kant. Recent agnosticism certainly owes to him the larger part of what has given it plausibility and attractiveness, very much of what is best in its spirit and strivings, and, in a word, very much of all that constitutes the superiority of recent agnosticism over earlier agnosticism.

## KANT'S EPISTEMOLOGY

Limited, however, as my treatment of Kant has been in scope, it may suffice to show that neither agnostics nor anti-agnostics can rationally go back to the epistemology of Kant as a foundation on which to build a philosophy. Anti-agnostics cannot, seeing that the Kantian epistemology is agnostic to the core. To say, as M. Auguste Sabatier does, that "to make Kantism end in scepticism shows a lack of intelligence," is to ignore the bases of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and to betray a strange ignorance of the epistemological doctrine which he so much admires. Intelligent agnostics can no more go back to Kant's theory of knowledge than their opponents, and that for the simple reason that it is in the main not a sure foundation but one of wood, hay, and stubble. They must substitute for it a better if they would not avow utter scepticism and avoid manifest inconsistency. They must not merely "go back" to Kant, but must do all the fundamental portion of his work over again.

A distinguished German Neo-Kantist once warned the philosophical world that Kant should only be criticised on the presumption that he was "a genius." Certainly he was "a genius," and a very great genius. But "a genius" should enjoy no immunity from criticism. Indeed, a genius is a man who is just as capable of going farther astray from the truth than other men as he is of making greater progress in it. Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza, Schelling, and Hegel were men of rare philosophical genius, but their genius did not preserve them from colossal blun-

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ders and terrible misadventures. Kant erred as they did, erred as a man of genius—erred, as Luther recommended Melancthon to sin, *fortiter*. It was in so erring that he affirmed, and tried but failed to prove those *dogmata* which so many have rashly accepted as the justification of their agnosticism. Hence many have cried “Back to Kant” who, had their intellectual vision been clearer, would have seen that they might more consistently cry, “Back from Kant to Hume”—back to the abyss which Hume revealed, and from the sight of which Kant recoiled, and then strove (largely, alas! in vain) to fill up and bridge over.

## CHAPTER V

### COMPLETE OR ABSOLUTE AGNOSTICISM

#### I. AGNOSTICISM NOT EXACTLY DIVISIBLE. ITS GENERAL DIVISIONS

AGNOSTICISM has already appeared in many forms, and may yet appear in many more. Being essentially indefinite, it is easily and manifoldly variable. Any agnostic thinker of ability may give to his agnosticism an original and individual character, although it seems to surpass the ingenuity of man to devise a type of agnosticism at once consistently agnostic and clearly distinctive. Agnosticism is, in fact, never self-consistent, and never exactly this or that, but always relatively a more or less; and, consequently, any mode of division of its forms which pretends to absolute logical correctness shows, on the part of its proposer, want of insight into the essentially Protean nature of his subject. Agnosticism, in a word, is not more exactly divisible or distributable than it is exactly definable. Hence to attempt any elaborate classification of its species and varieties would necessarily involve a waste of labour. Such a classification might possibly be made plausible, but would certainly be untrue.

The most current general divisions of agnosticism are into total and partial agnosticism, and into absolute and modified agnosticism. And, so far as I am

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aware, there are no others which are of any value. But although the best, the most fundamental, and the most instructive of such divisions,—and although no one can relevantly either argue for or against agnosticism without having regard to them,—they are rather ideal than real, and, one may almost say, are so general as to apply exactly to no particulars.

There never was, is not, and never will be, a total or absolute agnosticism. Man lacks the skill to construct and the courage to maintain a system which entirely and expressly disowns and disavows the rationality distinctive of his nature. What we may agree to call total or absolute agnosticism is never strictly either total or absolute, but always so far limited and qualified. While impartially, perhaps, spreading doubt over all things and extending its disavowals of knowledge to all the alleged spheres of knowledge, it is under the necessity of drawing lines and of making assumptions of some kind, which in some measure, and, it may be, to no small extent, restrict its profession of ignorance, and implicitly retract its doubts and disavowals. The pressure of physical phenomena, of states of consciousness, and of the necessities of practical life, is of so direct, imperative, and powerful a kind as inevitably to prevent a complete development of the agnostic ideal even in the most sceptically disposed individual.

On the other hand, there is no merely partial or modified agnosticism,—no agnosticism which is not inconsistent as partial and done violence to by modification,—which does not logically carry with it a

## NO PARTIAL AGNOSTICISM

demand to be completed and rendered thorough. The agnosticism which is explicitly partial and modified is, always and of necessity, implicitly total and absolute. For, while the objections which apply to agnosticism in general apply also, of course, to its special forms,—while any inconsistency involved in the very nature of agnosticism must be found in all its particular phases,—partial agnosticism always adds inconsistency of its own to that which is implied in the mere maintenance of agnosticism as such—an inconsistency inseparable from its specialisation. Agnosticism has no right to limit itself; its “thus far, but no farther,” is always an arbitrary one. The same kind of argumentation which is held to destroy the credit of one power of mind or department of knowledge would, were it valid at all, be equally decisive if directed against other powers of mind and departments of knowledge. We cannot set aside any one real law of thought, except on grounds which, if sufficient, would warrant us to set them all aside. Our rational life is a unity to which all its laws and powers are essential. From the rejection of the least of the laws of mind the rejection of all will logically follow. From the suspension or extension of the humblest of its powers the entire cessation of its intellectual activity must be a necessary consequence.

The divisions of agnosticism into total and partial, absolute and modified, may coincide, but are not identical. The one is a quantitative and the other a qualitative division. The one rests on difference of extension and the other on difference of nature.



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They are two forms of the complete and incomplete, but distinct forms. Much which is true of the one may be true of the other, and scrupulously to distinguish them on all occasions may often be pedantic, and even impossible. But it is necessary to know how and when to distinguish them.

Far from being always coincident, they may at times be contraries. Total agnosticism may be modified, and partial agnosticism may be absolute. The doubt or disbelief which is unlimited as to extent may be qualified in its nature; the doubt or disbelief which has a limited sphere assigned to it may have that sphere given wholly over to it.

It is likewise to be noted, however, that modification and limitation imply each other and are inseparable. Universal doubt or disbelief may be modified, and yet as modified extended to all things; but so far as modified it is limited throughout, although not limited to a particular sphere. The doubt or disbelief, on the other hand, which is limited to a particular sphere must be so limited because it differs in nature as in legitimacy from doubt or disbelief within the spheres in which certainty and knowledge are attainable. In like manner the absolute doubt or disbelief which is not total cannot be strictly absolute, and the total doubt which is not absolute cannot be strictly total. Totality as to extension and absoluteness as to nature are alike requisite to completeness. The partial and the modified are alike forms of incompleteness.

Agnosticism, then, is divisible into complete and

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incomplete as regards either nature or extension. The former refuses to admit that there is any certainty of knowledge, and questions the veracity of every principle and power of cognition. The latter refuses, with more or less of qualification, to admit certainty of knowledge, and questions the reality or veracity of some particular principle or principles, power or powers, of cognition.

The latter is, of course, much the more common. And it has a great variety of forms, seeing that distrust of any law of thought or faculty of mind leads to a partial agnosticism, even although due confidence be reposed in all the other laws and faculties of the mind. Thus there is an agnosticism which rejects the testimony of the senses while admitting that of reason, and an agnosticism which rejects the testimony of reason while admitting that of the senses. Then there is an agnosticism which holds religious truth to be unattainable but passes unchallenged the findings of philosophy and science, and an agnosticism which combines philosophical doubt with theological dogmatism. And so on. For the ends which the present writer has in view the most suitable classification of the incomplete or partial forms of agnosticism will be into non-religious, anti-religious, and religious. It is chiefly with anti-religious and religious agnosticism that he is in this work concerned. On non-religious partial agnosticism it will be unnecessary for him to say more than suffices to indicate its bearings on the agnosticism which deals adversely or favourably with religion.

## COMPLETE OR ABSOLUTE AGNOSTICISM

### II. WHY COMPLETE AGNOSTICISM REQUIRES TO BE DISCUSSED. CRITICISM OF THE VIEWS OF PAULSEN

Complete agnosticism must be first considered. Until it be disposed of we cannot reasonably proceed to judge of any other kind of agnosticism. The general includes the particular. If there be no certainty or knowledge there can be no religious certainty or knowledge. If the conclusion to which total or absolute agnosticism comes can be successfully maintained, all views to the contrary which men entertain regarding God, spiritual things, and theology must obviously be surrendered, equally with those which relate to nature and man, ordinary knowledge, physical science, and philosophy. We clearly cannot afford to grant that it is a warrantable conclusion, and hence must criticise the claims of the theory which has committed itself to its support.

And yet it is very probable that to most persons at first sight absolute agnosticism, universal scepticism, will appear too extravagant and incredible a scheme of thought to call for any discussion. They may doubt whether it has ever been seriously entertained or propounded, and think that to make any attempt to refute it, or to take any special notice of it, is to do it too much honour and to assign it too much importance. Nor is this view confined to those who are not conversant with philosophy and its history: it has been maintained by philosophical writers of good repute. Therefore it must not be quite ignored.

## PAULSEN ON THE THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

Professor Paulsen of Berlin may be selected as the spokesman of those who hold it. Treating of the theory of knowledge, or what is commonly called epistemology, he affirms that its fundamental problem must be answered in one or other of four distinct ways. These are:—

- (1) We know things as they are in themselves through perception. This is the answer of Realistic Empiricism, the view which comes nearest to the naïve of common conception.
- (2) We know things as they are but only through reason, not through the senses. This is the answer of Realistic Rationalism, the one returned by Plato, Spinoza, Hegel, and other great metaphysical system-builders.
- (3) We know about things only through perception, yet certainly attain thereby no adequate knowledge. This is the answer of Idealistic Empiricism, and Hume may be regarded as its most resolutely logical advocate.
- (4) We know reality *a priori* through pure reason, yet certainly not as it is in itself, but only as it appears to us, and indeed only according to the forms of our intuition. This is the answer of Idealistic Rationalism, the view of Kant.

Dr. Paulsen then proceeds to say: “The historians of philosophy are wont to bring before us yet another form of theory of knowledge, scepticism, which affirms that we can have no knowledge. Here and

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there some one even takes the trouble to contradict this view. It seems to me to be superfluous trouble. If there were ever real scepticism it has died out in modern times. No modern philosopher has doubted that there is real knowledge, distinguishable from nescience. It is customary to refer to Hume as the representative of scepticism. And, sure enough, Hume plays with the designation. For this he has been sufficiently punished by the consequent misconceptions of his meaning. But it never occurred to him to maintain that there is no such thing as science. He merely maintained, on the one hand, that natural theology with its proofs of the existence of God and of the immortality of the soul is not science; and, on the other hand, that any knowledge attainable regarding facts must be acquired through experience, and is not of universal and necessary validity. It was Kant who stamped Hume as a sceptic, whom he had to oppose in order to save the sciences and show the possibility of metaphysics, physics, and even mathematics. As regards pure mathematics Kant's judgment on Hume's scepticism rests on pure misunderstanding; as regards metaphysics he himself, not less than Hume, rejects rational theology, cosmology, and psychology. There remains physics: here both admit that there is such a science; they differ only in their views of the form and nature of the certainty of its propositions. Kant thinks that some among them are absolutely universal and necessary (*a priori* synthetic judgments), while Hume regards even its axioms as only presumptively general propositions

## PAULSEN ON PHILOSOPHICAL SCEPTICISM

dependent on experience,—a difference of opinion which cannot be fitly expressed by saying that Hume denies the possibility of physics.

“ So far as I see, it is the same with other sceptics. They do not deny the possibility or the existence of the sciences, but only emphasise the limitedness and uncertainty of human science compared with an ideal of knowledge such as may possibly be realised in a divine mind. The only scepticism to be found in modern philosophy is one which opposes the pretensions of transcendental speculation; it shows a two-fold aspect, inasmuch as it defends either religious faith or empirical research against the usurpations of speculation.”<sup>1</sup>

Now, such statements as these are so apt to mislead that they cannot prudently be passed over in silence. They are, for the most part, very inaccurate.

The historians of philosophy are quite justified in bringing philosophical scepticism before us in the way which they generally do. They could neither reasonably ignore so remarkable a phase of philosophy, nor could they give any substantially different account of it than that which they present. They could only adopt Dr. Paulsen's view of it by disregarding or misinterpreting the sources of information relative to it. However, it is inaccurate to say that they represent scepticism as “ a kind of theory of knowledge which maintains that we can have no knowledge.” This they are *not* “ wont to do.” On the contrary, all historians of philosophy of good re-

<sup>1</sup> *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, 352-353.



## COMPLETE OR ABSOLUTE AGNOSTICISM

pute represent scepticism as a kind of theory of knowledge the holders of which, if not invariably at least as a rule, content themselves with maintaining that those who profess to have knowledge,—those whom they regard as dogmatists,—have not, in their judgment, succeeded in showing that they have rational grounds for their profession, or for the belief which it implies.

Dr. Paulsen pronounces it “superfluous trouble” to contradict the sceptical theory of knowledge. But were no one to contravert it, and to show grounds for rejecting it, would the need for any other theory of knowledge be made out? Would not, in that case, all search for another theory of knowledge be justly censurable as “superfluous trouble”?

The actual historical existence of philosophical scepticism, both in ancient and in modern times, is about as certain as anything historical can be. There can only be reasonable difference of opinion as to whether or not there has appeared an absolutely complete, fully and self-consistently, evolved scepticism in the course of the history of philosophy. We are ready to grant that there has not; that such scepticism is not only a rare phenomenon in history, but an unknown and indeed an impossible and inconceivable one. Are not, however, all the specifically distinct theories of knowledge in this respect on the same level? Are not realism and idealism, empiricism and rationalism, equally with scepticism, theories of knowledge which have only attained in history an incomplete and inconsistent manifestation? Has

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there, for instance, been any one who, fully realising what he meant, affirmed that *he knew things as they are in themselves through, and only through, perception?* Has there ever been a man so naïf or such a philosophical simpleton as to be a mere and complete realistic empiricist? Scepticism—*i.e.*, universal scepticism or absolute agnosticism—stands on the same footing as other theories of knowledge in being rather an ideal than a reality; and in its contradiction being rather an argument against a general speculative tendency than against the doctrine of any particular person, even the most sceptical.

On the other hand, philosophical scepticism has often advanced very far towards completeness,—so far that the discussion of it as complete is legitimate and necessary. In the course of the history of speculation many thinkers have appeared whose views as to knowledge left hardly any room for belief in its reality. In antiquity, Pyrrho and his followers—the founders and disciples of the Middle Academy—and the members of the later sceptical schools, such as Enesidemus, Agrippa, and Sextus Empiricus,—all refused to admit that any proposition as to the reality of things or as to real truth could be known or proved with certainty, and held that, as to the truth or falsity of such propositions, suspension of judgment was the appropriate state of mind. Those who went thus far were surely very nearly complete sceptics, although they could not avoid making some concessions inconsistent therewith, but without which they could never have justified their reasoning or act-

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ing on any subject or occasion whatever. Then, the theological agnostics who, from the Renaissance to the present day, have laboured to discredit natural reason in order to induce men to put their trust in supernatural grace or the guidance of external authority, are to be accounted, to all intents and purposes, sceptics as to knowledge and science in general.

Now, what of Hume? "It never occurred to him," says Dr. Paulsen, "to maintain that there is no such thing as science." No, and that is not what has been attributed to him. He neither denied that there was any such thing as science, nor professed to disbelieve what either science or sense taught. What he did was to undertake and carry out ingenious investigations which served inevitably to lead to the conclusion that those who believed the teaching of either sense or science, experience or reason, had no logically valid grounds for doing so. His scepticism, in other words, did not appear in a direct denial of the existence of knowledge, but in an elaborate reduction of substances to collections of ideas, of time and space to subjective conceptions, of the causal connection to habitual association, of reason to custom, and the like. And a very thorough scepticism it was. If the conclusions to which it led were well-founded, no kind of knowledge was well-founded; if it proved anything, it proved that perception, experience, and reasoning proved nothing. It was concentrated in the metempirical criticism which he applied to the bases of all knowledge. That criticism was subversive of all science and philosophy; as subversive of mathe-

## HUME'S SCEPTICISM

matics and physics as of theology and metaphysics. Hume would have been not less of a sceptic if he had never written a sentence about natural theology. It is as erroneous to say that he was an unbeliever in the existence of God or in the immortality of the soul as that he was an unbeliever in the law of gravitation; and, on the other hand, it is as erroneous to represent him as recognising that the law of gravitation can be any more rationally proved or known than the existence of God or the immortality of the soul. Says Mr. Balfour not less justly than forcibly: "Nothing in the history of speculation is more astonishing; nothing—if I am to speak my whole mind—is more absurd than the way in which Hume's philosophic progeny—a most distinguished race—have, in spite of all their differences, yet been able to agree, *both* that experience is essentially as Hume described it, *and* that from such an experience can be rationally extracted anything even in the remotest degree resembling the existing system of the natural sciences." <sup>1</sup>

That Hume is brought before us by the historians of philosophy as a sceptic is certainly not owing to Kant having "stamped" him as such. He presented himself to the world as a sceptic, the author of a philosophy akin to the Greek sceptical philosophy. He pleaded "the privileges of a sceptic" for just the kind of reasonings on account of which alone fair expositors of his views designate him a sceptic. He wrote and spoke familiarly of "his scepticism" as

<sup>1</sup> *The Foundations of Belief*, p. 103 (8th ed.)

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“his philosophy”; took no objection to his most distinctive speculations being characterised and criticised as “sceptical”; and was universally recognised, both in Britain and on the Continent, as a sceptic, yea, the *coryphæus scepticorum* of modern times, as soon as his philosophical writings became known. Kant was not at fault in attributing to Hume a scepticism as sweepingly destructive as that of a Carneades or Ænesidemus: his mistake lay in supposing that his own Critical Philosophy was an antidote to it.

We have so recently had Mr. Arthur Balfour, Dr. Gordy, the Abbé Martin, and others arguing in the most explicit manner that the foundations on which physical science rests are not rational grounds of conviction, but non-rational impressions, impulses, or inclinations, that it is impossible for us to admit that even the latest scepticism, the scepticism of to-day, merely emphasises the limitations and uncertainties of human science or restricts itself to opposing the pretensions of transcendental speculation. It does that, but it also unquestionably does more. It likewise challenges all so-called positive science to show that its principles are not merely assumptions which have no other guarantee than the fact that they are believed, and that the processes through which its results are obtained are not logically illicit and inconclusive inferences. What it avowedly and expressly seeks to show is that the foundations of the creed of science are just of the same character as those on account of which so many scientists deem

## COMPLETE AGNOSTICISM

themselves entitled to refuse serious consideration to any religious creed. The interest and value of the latest defences of "philosophic doubt" depend mainly on their being a criticism of the claims of science and of the pretensions which have been based on science.

The agnostic solution of the problem of knowledge, however strange or unsatisfactory it may seem to us, is obviously a distinct form of solving it, and one of a thoroughly radical and comprehensive kind. Hence it should not be ignored by us, but examined as to what it essentially and distinctively is, although it may never have been fully realised as such in any one historical system. To refuse to do this on the ground that it has never been so realised is a clear evasion of logical duty, and much more convenient than commendable. A complete agnosticism is, indeed, nowhere to be found, and consequently a refutation of it cannot apply strictly and immediately or with full force to the teaching of any actual individual agnostic. It is, therefore, of less practical use than it would be were complete agnosticism prevalent. It leaves a special examination and refutation of each form of agnostic doctrine still necessary. It is, however, useful, and even essential, in its place. It applies indirectly and in some measure to all that is truly agnosticism, and, indeed, applies to it precisely to the extent to which it is truly agnosticism. All incomplete agnosticism tends to completion, and must be so far judged of by what it would be if complete. All actual agnosticism must be viewed in relation to that absolute agnosticism which is simply



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the full natural and logical development of agnosticism.

### III. SPECIES OF COMPLETE AGNOSTICISM. INCONSISTENCY OF SYSTEMATIC AND UNIVERSAL DOUBT

The agnosticism which professes to be complete, or at least aims at completeness, both as to extent and nature, may be received in various aspects or relations. Let us consider it first as to self-consistency or rational self-coherence.

1. Complete agnosticism is either systematic and universal doubt or systematic and universal disbelief. This is not the view commonly taken. Complete agnosticism is generally considered to be merely systematic and universal doubt. It is said that to disbelieve is, in reality, to believe that what is disbelieved is erroneous, and, therefore, that it is incompatible with the force or philosophical scepticism which is designated agnosticism.

But to doubt is also in the same way to believe; it is to believe that there is no warrant for a decision, —that there is such a want of evidence in regard to a proposition, or that the evidence for and the evidence against a proposition are so nearly balanced that we are not entitled either to affirm or deny that proposition. The opposite of belief is neither disbelief nor doubt but the absence of belief. An element of belief can no more be eliminated from doubt than from disbelief. If this be inconsistent with absolute philosophical scepticism or complete agnosticism, inas-

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much as it means that neither by doubting or denying can belief be entirely got rid of, it is only because such scepticism or agnosticism is not, and cannot be, self-consistent.

A man believing nothing except that he knows nothing still believes something. He does not believe more, however, than a man who doubts whether he knows anything or not; on the contrary, more belief is reserved in the doubt of the latter than in the disbelief of the former. A man who disbelieves his senses on the ground that the senses are unveracious, is at least as much of a sceptic and agnostic as one who cannot decide whether to believe them or not. No doubt can be more sweepingly sceptical or agnostic than an absolute denial of the possibility of knowledge. The utmost extreme and extravagance of agnosticism is to be attained not through mere doubt but through a double negation, which, by first denying all things and then denying itself, leaves reason objectless and powerless—a double negation for which Arcesilaos may have found the formula, although not meaning to convey by it the signification, when, in opposition to the “I know nothing, except that I know nothing,” of Socrates, he said, “I know nothing, not even that I know nothing.”

Agnosticism, then, may be regarded as either doubt or disbelief of the attainability of knowledge and truth, and the question now before us is, Can a complete or absolute agnosticism be self-consistent? It is a question which I can only answer in the negative. While agnosticism must be inconsistent so long as it is

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not complete, it cannot be consistent when it is complete. It is of its very nature inconsistent and self-contradictory. It is so, alike as universal disbelief and as universal doubt. Both of these states of mind are essentially irrational. And the irrational cannot become rational by logical development; inconsistency cannot be transformed into consistency by being completed.

To make manifest the self-contradictoriness latent in *the strictly absolute agnosticism alike of doubt and of disbelief* is the task now immediately before us.

Agnosticism, then, cannot be self-consistent in the form of systematic and universal doubt. It supposes even in this form a power of weighing evidence which is irreconcilable with the absolute distrust and indecision which it inculcates. Men do not doubt, any more than they believe or disbelieve, what they have no evidence either for or against, and know nothing about. So far from implying an entire absence of judgment, doubt is a suspension of judgment based on the judgment that neither an affirmative nor a negative judgment would be warranted in the circumstances. Where evidence and knowledge are wholly wanting, belief, disbelief, and doubt are alike out of place. The mind is then a blank, unintelligent and unconscious; but this state of mere blankness or emptiness, if it can be called a state, is wholly different from doubt.

Doubt is an actual or positive condition of mind, and often a most legitimate and valuable one, but it requires justification equally with belief and disbe-

## LIMITS OF DOUBT

lief, and it can only be justified by showing that the reasons both for belief and disbelief, for affirmation and negation, are insufficient—that they counterbalance and counteract one another. This implies, however, that the mind is competent to estimate the reasons both for belief and disbelief, for affirmation and negation, and to weigh the one set of reasons against the other set. It supposes that belief, disbelief, and doubt should correspond to evidence, and that evidence may be so apprehended and appreciated as to explain and effectuate the correspondence. A mind altogether incapable of knowing itself entitled to believe and disbelieve must be as incapable of knowing itself entitled to doubt, and, consequently, must be as much bound to suspend its doubt as its belief or its disbelief; or, in other words, must not reason, judge, or think at all. Everything short of, or different from, the entire ejection of intelligence, the absolute suppression of rational activity, must be irrational in a mind so constituted; and, in fact, such a mind would be a reason of which every movement would be necessarily unreasonable. The mind of man has not been so constituted, and is not thus under the appearance of rationality realised absurdity; and hence its doubting, not less than its believing and disbelieving, properly exercised, is a perfectly legitimate mode of existence and activity—one dependent on and accordant with reason.

Doubt, pushed to its utmost extent, is only intelligible on the supposition that the mind can appreciate evidence, and distinguish between truth and error.

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It presupposes, in other words, the very truth and certainty which the agnostic would persuade us it sets aside. Thus we have only to compare the latent assumptions from which the agnostic reasons with the conclusion at which he arrives, to find that his alleged demonstration of absolute doubt is also a *reductio ad absurdum* of such doubt, the doubt itself being essentially inconsistent. The agnosticism of absolute doubt is self-condemned by its self-contradiction.

The agnostic, it is often said, can have no creed. The saying shows lack of reflection: no rational being can be creedless. The agnostic can no more dispense with a creed than his neighbours, although it may be peculiarly difficult or inconvenient for him to profess that he has one. He needs a creed even in order to prove that there should be none. The advocate of universal doubt cannot take a single step towards the vindication of his doubt unless he believes, and believes himself to know what certainty, knowledge, evidence, and truth are. He may, and, indeed, as a matter of course, will prefer such views of certainty, knowledge, evidence, and truth as seem to him most likely to subserve his purpose, but the very choice and use of these or any views regarding them implies a belief in the very things—certainty, knowledge, evidence, and truth—of which universal doubt is the negation. “The very logic,” says Edward Caird, “by which the sceptic overthrows the dogmas of philosophy, implies that the mind possesses in itself the form and idea of truth. His deepest doubt reveals a certitude that transcends and embraces it.”

## RELATION OF BELIEF TO KNOWLEDGE

There is a haziness of conception in the minds of many persons as to the real relationship of doubt to belief and disbelief which cannot but prevent full recognition of the force of the preceding remarks. Perhaps a few words may somewhat help to clear it away.

Belief is the assent of the mind to what it regards as true—to what it thinks it knows. It is easily distinguishable from such mental states as imagination, feeling, desire, and volition, but inseparable from all rational intellection both intuitive and discursive, and coextensive with true and erroneous judgment, real and imagined knowledge. No man can believe anything which he does not suppose that he knows to be true. What the mind in belief regards as true may not be true, but it cannot believe what it does not apprehend as true; what the mind believes it knows it may not know, but without believing that it knows it cannot believe at all. There is thus in the very nature of belief a direct reference to knowledge and truth. Those who would base all knowledge on mere belief or reduce all knowledge to mere belief overlook that there is no such thing as mere belief, as entirely self-contained belief; that there is only belief which includes a reference and appeal to knowledge and truth. Those who talk of a belief which is its own guarantee directly contradict the testimony which belief bears regarding itself. The voice of all belief is: I speak not on my own authority; I have no right to acceptance or existence except what I receive from knowledge and truth.



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Belief adheres indissolubly to all knowledge. Whatever we know, we believe. There is no difference in this respect between immediate or intuitive and mediate or discursive knowledge; between presentative and representative knowledge; between knowledge of the past, present, or future; between the knowledge which comes to us through sense, or through the understanding, or through the reason. It has often been attempted by the perverse use of terms to separate belief from knowledge, and to oppose the one to the other, but every attempt of the kind is sophistical and irrational. The opposition of belief to knowledge has no proper meaning or justification. Wherever there is knowledge, there is belief founded on the knowledge; and wherever there is belief not founded on knowledge, it is illegitimate and self-contradictory belief. Of course, there is an immense amount of belief of the latter kind—of belief in a knowledge which is not real but imaginary, of assent to error under the impression that it is truth. Belief, while co-extensive with real knowledge, is far more extensive; it is as inseparable from false as from true judgment, from the abnormal as from the normal workings of the mind in the exercise of its cognitive faculties.

A world where belief was precisely co-extensive with knowledge, precisely in accordance with evidence, would be a world where there were no erroneous beliefs. Our world is still very far, indeed, from being such a world. It is, however, the goal which a rational world should strive to reach. It is

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the ideal at which a rational man should aim. We cannot believe what we do not know, or think we know; but we have no right to believe more than we know, or to be content with merely thinking we know instead of trying our best really and truly to know. Evidence should be the measure of assent. All real evidence we are bound to receive, and to estimate according to its actual weight and value.

What is true of belief is equally true of disbelief, and for the simple reason that disbelief is belief. But slight reflection is needed to dispel the common notion that disbelief is the opposite of belief. The man who disbelieves in Irish Home Rule believes just as much as the man who believes in it, only he believes that it would be bad, whereas the other believes that it would be good. Disbelief is not the opposite of belief, but belief of the opposite—belief that a particular proposition is not true. The believer and the disbeliever differ only in that their beliefs differ and conflict. Both have beliefs, and they are alike responsible for the character and correctness of their beliefs.

Nor is doubt the opposite of belief. To doubt is to believe that there is not warrant for a firm decision,—that there is insufficient evidence for a resolved and settled belief. It implies a commingling of belief and disbelief; or, as it may be also expressed—since disbelief is itself belief—a combination of positive and negative is belief. When the evidence in favour of a proposition seems to a man full, he believes and does not doubt; when the evidence against it seems to him full, he disbelieves and does not doubt; when the

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evidence in regard to it seems to him inadequate in amount or ambiguous in character, partly in favour of and partly against its affirmation, he partly believes and partly disbelieves—believes because there is evidence, and disbelieves because it is not of such quantity and quality as to show whether the proposition be true or not—and only in this case does he doubt. Doubt is thus of a double nature: a mixture of belief and unbelief; the opposite of neither belief nor disbelief, but only of assured belief or assured disbelief. It is so far from being a state of mind independent of, or distinct from, belief or disbelief, that it may approximate closely to both and be difficult to distinguish from either. We may think that we believe when there is much unbelief in our belief, and that we doubt when there is much faith in our doubt. “More faith,” the poet truly tells us, “may live in honest doubt than in half the creeds.” The conflict of judgments and the counteraction of belief and disbelief in doubt are what is characteristic of it, and what the very terms for doubt in the various languages of the world show that men have everywhere recognised to be its characteristic.

Belief and disbelief, then, are two species of belief, and doubt contains both and arises from their counteraction. Wherever there is perceptive or intellectual judgment, intuition, or inference of any kind, there also is belief in its positive, negative, or dubitative form; and in whatever form it appears, it should correspond to the relevant attainable evidence. When Dr. Bain and other psychologists tell us that doubt

## NATURE OF DOUBT

is the opposite of belief, they are obviously mistaken. It is *belief*, and belief of a particular kind—belief that the reasons for and the reasons against some opinion or proposition tend more or less to counteract and cancel one another, and so warrant neither a decidedly affirmative nor a decidedly negative belief. It necessarily supposes in every case some degree of belief, some perception of evidence, and a certain power of estimating the weight and worth of evidence. The only opposite to belief is the absence of belief, and there can only be the entire absence of belief in a mind devoid of all judgment as to truth and error and of all apprehension of evidence. Entire ignorance is the only complete security against doubt. “Men that know nothing in sciences,” says Archbishop Leighton, “have no doubts.”

If doubt be of the nature now described, the essential inconsistency of the agnosticism of absolute doubt is apparent. Doubt in every case requires to justify itself no less than belief or disbelief. It ought equally to be in accordance with evidence, and it has specially to judge the evidence both for and against what is doubted. It should give heed even to the least evidence, and to all the evidence *pro* and *con*. It is the most complex form of belief, the latest to make its appearance in consciousness and history, and the most difficult correctly to regulate or appreciate. The child, the savage, and the common man believe and disbelieve more readily than they doubt. Doubt is a peculiarly unstable state of mind. Dubious questioning is to men in general unpleasant, and to

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many men intolerable. Dull believing or vehement disbelieving is easier to them, and more in favour with them even when much less commendable.

What, then, would justify such a state of mind as the scepticism of absolute or universal doubt? Only a completely self-contradictory world; one in which the evidence for all opinions was equal to the evidence against them; one in which reason would be condemned to perpetual self-stultification; one in which all search for truth and weighing of evidence would necessarily lead only to learned ignorance strictly and literally understood—an ignorance absolute and complete, and yet one only capable of being established by an absolute and complete knowledge. In a world so strangely constituted self-contradiction would be the one great law, and the pure Pyrrhonist the only wise man, if even he were wise. The inhabitants of it would need no other excuse for their individual contradictions and inconsistencies than the words of the poet:—

“Die Welt ist voller Widerspruch,  
Und sollte sich's nicht widersprechen?”

The uniformly self-contradictory person in a completely self-contradictory world would, if I may say so, be the only self-consistent character.

The existence of a self-contradictory world, however, has never yet been proved, and must be peculiarly difficult to prove by those who think nothing can be proved. So far as I can judge, it has never been shown that there are any other contradictions

## A SELF-CONTRADICTORY WORLD ASSUMED

in the world than those for which such beings as ourselves—beings who too frequently judge and act irrationally—are responsible.

### IV. INCONSISTENCY OF SYSTEMATIC AND UNIVERSAL DISBELIEF

Agnosticism, I proceed to maintain, cannot be self-consistent in the form of systematic and universal disbelief. In the very act of maintaining that truth cannot be reached, it implies that it has been reached. It is a denial that truth can be attained, but an affirmation of the untrustworthiness of the mind. It rejects all that the mind ordinarily regards as true, but on the ground that the mind is incompetent to ascertain what is true. Is, then, we are bound to ask, this allegation of the mind's incompetency to ascertain truth itself true? It obviously must be held to be so by those who make it, and who reject all other affirmations on the strength of it. Unless it be a truth, and a truth better established than all other statements asserted to be truths, agnosticism as universal disbelief, as denial of the existence and possibility of knowledge, can have no rational warrant. If, on the other hand, it be a truth, what is to be made of the doctrine that truth is unattainable? Why, in this case truth has been attained. One truth so comprehensive as to be a whole philosophy in itself—a truth which enables us to decide on the worth of every proposition which the human mind can entertain—has been actually and adequately established.



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If the mind, however, can acquire even one truth, and especially if it can make itself master of so abstruse and significant a truth as is alleged, it cannot consistently be held to be so untrustworthy as the agnostic represents it to be. If the mind be justified in one instance in saying No, it may be warranted in other instances in saying Yes. The mind which can prove its own incompetence can hardly be so incompetent after all. It thereby shows itself capable of accomplishing an especially arduous task, the ascertainment of its own utmost reach of capacity and faculty, of what it absolutely can and cannot do. This must require a most difficult and elaborate investigation into the nature and limits of intelligence, and the reason which can successfully prosecute it cannot be so weak as is asserted. There is no kind of research in which failure is more probable. There is no question as to which the mind is less likely to succeed in finding an answer than that as to the limits of its own capacities. Hence the agnostic negation is a denial that truth can be reached in cases where its attainment should be comparatively easy, based on the presupposition that it has been reached in a case where its attainment must be peculiarly difficult.

That it is a negation—a denial of the right of the intellect to accept anything as true—clearly does not affect the argument. It has no relevancy as an answer to it. A negative conclusion should be as much a result of investigation as a positive one. A negative judgment, if really warranted, is as much a truth as an affirmative one. Disbelief, as already shown,

## WHAT UNIVERSAL DISBELIEF IMPLIES

is not the opposite of belief but belief of the opposite, and as much dependent on truth and evidence as the opposite belief. Nor is disbelief—negative belief—easier to prove than belief—positive belief. Nay, a negative is often specially difficult to prove. And the difficulty of proving the vast and daring negative distinctive of complete agnostic disbelief must be enormous. In fact, it would require omniscience to accomplish such a task. To affirm rationally what cannot be known one must have a comprehensive acquaintance with whatever is or may be; in other words, to know that nothing is knowable one would require to have a thorough knowledge of everything. But an agnosticism thus absolute would be identical with a complete gnosticism. The sceptical “there is no attainable knowledge of truth” is uttermost scepticism; but it implies an “I know that there is no attainable knowledge of truth,” which is an expression of the uttermost conceivable dogmatism, and all the more dogmatic owing to its self-contradictoriness.

Suppose disbelief pushed to the uttermost point conceivable. Suppose a man to maintain that we have no warrant to believe anything and should disbelieve everything. Does he thereby get rid of belief or its obligations? By no means. He is left with an enormous amount of belief for which he ought to have good reasons. His disbelief includes belief that every affirmative proposition which the human mind can entertain is false, and implies belief that the evidence seemingly for every such proposition is unsatisfactory while the evidence against it is conclusive.

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Now a man with so much belief as that has surely more instead of less of it than his neighbours. And although he may, in one sense, rightly call himself an unbeliever or sceptic, he may in another and as legitimate a sense be justly maintained to be a greater dogmatist than any scholastic metaphysician or infallibilist theologian known to history.

Such a sceptic has much faith of a kind, and of a kind greatly in need of strong proof. It is a faith which presupposes a demonstration that the world is one which warrants the inference only of negative propositions. What sort of world would that be? One entirely disappointing to intelligence. One of which the very existence is inconceivable, and which were it real would be at every moment and point of its existence an offence and torture to thought. Not even the most self-confident, perhaps, of transcendentalist metaphysicians will dare to grapple with the dread idea of a world of which nothing except negations are true; and certainly no one else will be so audacious. Fortunately the world of experience neither demands from us the superhuman intellectual exertions nor inflicts on us the continuous and intolerable intellectual disappointment which the world of the absolute agnosticism of disbelief must do. The actual world often yields, indeed, to our investigations merely so-called "negative results"; but they are "negative" only in the sense that they *negate our misconceptions* of its realities; not in a sense which would put the world itself and reason itself to shame.

## AGNOSTICISM AND FIRST PRINCIPLES

### V. ABSOLUTE AGNOSTICISM AND FIRST PRINCIPLES

Absolute agnosticism we have argued to be inherently inconsistent. Let us now consider it in relation to the primary grounds of belief, the ultimate principles of knowledge.

The reality and validity of such primary grounds or ultimate principles are implied in all knowledge and reasoning. The most radical and resolute scepticism cannot dispense with the use of them even when attempting to displace and discredit them. It must assume and proceed on them even in order to vindicate its rejection of them. However complete, it cannot free itself from the obligation of trying to prove its assertions and endeavouring to convince others of their truth. Committed although it be to deny or question the reality or attainability of truth, it must claim to be itself true and truly established, and so far imply that there is truth, and that truth can be distinguished from error. While unable to admit that there is knowledge, it is not entitled to believe or assert that there is none unless it knows its belief or assertion to be well founded, which of itself would prove that there is knowledge, and that knowledge is distinguishable from ignorance and illusion. The very doubt or disbelief distinctive of the agnostic supposes, in fact, a faith which implies a creed, a whole system of judgments, which, notwithstanding the agnostic denial of knowledge, only knowledge can justify. Further, agnosticism professes to be a kind of philosophy, and undertakes to support and defend

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itself and to assail and overthrow other systems by means of reason and reasoning. And this implies that there are laws of rational procedure, and some criterion or criteria by which it may be determined when these laws are observed and when violated.

It follows that the question as to the relationship of absolute agnosticism to primary principles of knowledge must be one which vitally concerns it. What, then, is that relationship?

Well, in the first place, such an agnosticism, if an agnosticism of doubt, must obviously doubt all first principles, and if an agnosticism of disbelief, must disbelieve them. What it clearly cannot do is to believe them. It must reject them; cannot without self-destruction accept them. Its attitude towards self-evidence is necessarily that of distrust or denial, not that of trust. In a word, it must assume that there are no primary grounds of belief, no first principles of knowledge. If there be any such grounds or principles knowledge exists; its foundations are laid, and a complete agnosticism is manifestly extravagant.

In the second place, the agnosticism in question is not only logically bound to make the assumption that there are no first principles, but vitally interested in adhering to it. To have to admit that the assumption is unwarranted is for it equivalent to having to acknowledge itself throughout essentially untenable. If the foundations of knowledge be solid, if the laws which regulate intellectual activity be trustworthy, the theory that the mind of man can build up only false and illusory structures must be extravagant.

## AGNOSTICISM REJECTS FIRST PRINCIPLES

Absolute agnosticism, then, is incapable of either taking up or maintaining an impartial attitude towards first principles. It may profess to be fairly and reasonably critical of them, and neither more nor less; but it cannot really afford to be so. Its relationship towards them is of necessity as faulty as that of the most thorough dogmatism. A right relationship to them is one which does not exclude criticism of them, but which does exclude alike arbitrary rejection of them and predetermination to prove them untrustworthy.

It does not exclude, I say, criticism of them—any criticism of them which is just and rational. On the contrary, it is a manifestly incumbent and important part of the work of philosophy to criticise and test all principles alleged to be primary either as constitutive of knowledge or regulative of its growth. Ordinary thought, of course, does not do so. It accepts them without question; apprehends, believes, and acts on them unreflectively as self-evident. And this is quite natural. It is all that the ordinary man can do, and all that he feels the slightest need of doing. But there is an obvious disadvantage attached to his mode of procedure. The ordinary man very often accepts as self-evident what is extremely questionable or entirely erroneous. What he deems primary certainties may be merely inherited or current prejudices. What he trusts as natural reason or common-sense may be unnatural or nonsensical. A genuine philosopher cannot take the ordinary man as his guide or example.

Nor can he take as such the ordinary scientist.



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The scientific specialist is, of course, much more careful in his dealing with first principles than the ordinary man; but his attitude towards them is not essentially different. He does not any more than the ordinary man make them a subject of special investigation. He does not discriminate them from all else that is to be found in thought, and examine them in themselves, in their inter-relations, and their bearings on knowledge as a whole. He simply selects those of which as a specialist he has need, and of the peculiar worth of which he is aware. Scientific thought is thus, like ordinary thought, uncritical in its attitude towards knowledge and the first principles thereof. None of the special sciences start with a criticism and theory of knowledge. And in so doing they act wisely, for otherwise they would find it difficult to start at all.

Philosophy even may so far proceed in the same way. Its province is, not like that of the sciences, mere sections of knowledge, but knowledge as a whole. It may, however, simply accept knowledge as given to it through the sciences; or, in other words, may make the sciences the object of its study, trace their relations, exhibit them as an organic whole, co-ordinate and combine their conclusions, and present to the mind as correct a picture as it can of the whole intelligible world from the results thus obtained. Philosophy at this stage—what may be called positive or scientific philosophy—differs from ordinary thought and special scientific thought simply in virtue of its generality or comprehensiveness. It is not self-criti-

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cising thought; although reasoned it is unreflective; it builds up what is admitted to be knowledge into a systematic or structural unity, but it does not inquire what so-called knowledge is or is essentially worth; it is merely an advance on special science, as special science itself is on ordinary knowledge, and ordinary knowledge on crude sensation. Along the whole line the mind never changes its attitude towards its objects; at the end this is just what it was at the beginning; it is assumptive and dogmatic throughout.

Philosophy, however, may assume, and is bound to assume, another attitude; may pass, and ought to pass, from a dogmatic to a critical stage. It is called on to undertake a task which neither ordinary thought nor special science can perform, and yet which is a much-needed supplement to the work of both—namely, a methodical and impartial examination of the conditions and guarantees of knowledge as such, and in whatever form it may appear. And in the fulfilment of this duty it must be largely a criticism of the so-called primary or ultimate principles of knowledge.

The criticism may conceivably lead to a completely sceptical result; that is to say, it may show all so-called knowledge to be credulity and all so-called science to be illusory. It may conceivably convict reason itself of being responsible for the inconsistencies in agnostic argumentation, and make so manifest the constitutional invalidity and vanity of thought as, in a sort of way, to justify the claim of absolute agnosticism to be the best philosophy attainable. The conceivability of the criticism having so

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tremendous an issue, however, is not a sufficient ground for refusing to undertake it. Rather is it a reason for undertaking it, and for conducting it in as earnest and thorough a manner as possible.

The right, then, of the sceptic to institute a criticism of the conditions of knowledge is not here called in question. On the contrary, to institute it is fully admitted to be a philosophical duty. Nor is it over-severity or even over-subtlety which is held to be the fault of the sceptical criticism of principles. What it is charged with is unfairness, unreasonableness.

The most thorough sceptic can no more refuse to proceed from and make use of first principles than the most absolute dogmatist. Let him analyse the mental processes and verbal argumentations through which he reaches and justifies his sceptical views and conclusions, and he must inevitably find those principles to have been his own primary assumptions. Hence he is as much bound as other thinkers to beware of taking for first principles what are not such. He ought carefully to distinguish them from all that is of an *a posteriori*, particular, contingent, or inferential character in intellection and belief. He should criticise every apparent first principle with a view to determine whether it is not merely apparent, or secondary, or false. He should only accept it as what it seems or is said to be after he has satisfied himself that it really is primary or *a priori*; that it is self-evident and necessary—not only immediately seen to be true, but what must be true; and that it is natural and universal—true always and everywhere, true for

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all persons and in all cases. So far as he merely does that he is plainly within his right, and only acts as he ought to do.

But as plainly he has no right to resist real self-evidence or to reject what are truly first principles. That, however, is precisely what an absolute agnostic never fails to do, and indeed, must do. His whole hypothesis compels him to take up a distinctly antagonistic attitude towards first principles. He cannot afford to assent even to self-evidence. Were he to do so he would have no case. He must refuse to acknowledge the reality and validity even of first principles. And that is an obviously wrong attitude to assume towards them. Primary and self-evident truths, necessary conditions of knowledge, are entitled to be trusted. Mental sanity requires their acceptance. Whoever rejects them, whoever begins with doubt or disbelief of them, starts as an agnostic in order that he may end as one, and so be consistent in absurdity throughout. The absolute agnostic must act thus.

His demand for proof of what are truly primitive judgments or first principles is, of course, one which cannot be met, but it is also one which it is irrational to make. They cannot be conclusions of any process of proof seeing that they are the conditions of all proofs and conclusions. "Did not reasoning," said Royer-Collard, "rest upon principles anterior to itself, analysis would be without end, and synthesis without commencement." As all reasoning supposes knowledge, all knowledge cannot be gained by reason-

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ing. In refusing to accept first principles without proof an agnostic acts as foolishly as a man who should insist on being provided with a medium wherewith he may see light, although light is itself the only medium by which anything can be seen.

The right attitude of mind, then, towards first principles is that of belief, because of their self-evidence. Doubt or disbelief of their truth and validity is a wilful rejection of the light of self-evidence, and begs the question in favour of scepticism.

This is all the more manifest inasmuch as agnosticism itself has to assume and make use of them in order to vindicate its rejection of them. No otherwise can it justify its doubt or disbelief of truth or knowledge. But it thus places itself in a most equivocal and inconsistent position relatively alike to truth, knowledge, and the laws of reason.

It need not deny that *truth exists*. It may or may not admit that there is truth. But it must deny or question that truth can be found, and yet must also claim to be itself true, and truly established.

It cannot admit that there is *knowledge*; for knowledge even of a phenomenon is not itself phenomenal, and so-called subjective certainty is mere feeling. Wherever there is knowledge mere feeling and subjectivity are transcended. Knowledge implies judgment, but the judgment that everything is or is not, or that it is doubtful whether it is or is not, a phenomenon as contradistinguished from a reality, is not itself given as a phenomenon. What agnosticism really asks us to accept, therefore, is not the simply

## REJECTION OF LAWS OF THOUGHT

phenomenal, but a system of judgments regarding phenomena. But that it can only do on the ground of knowledge, notwithstanding its denial of the possibility of knowledge.

It must, further, refuse to accept even *the necessary laws of thought* as true, or to admit that anything really is what it necessarily appears in thought to be; for not to do so would be the retraction of all that is distinctive of it. And yet it is only by availing itself of those laws that it can give any plausibility to its own reasonings. The reasoning of the agnostic is as dependent as the reasoning of other men on the existence and validity of the necessary principles of thought. In setting those principles aside, therefore, he as thoroughly refutes his own conclusions as those of his opponents,—or rather more so, for his opponents do not admit that he is entitled to discard first principles. If he cannot show that he is warranted to do that, his explicit refutation of others is the part of his procedure in which he fails, and his implicit refutation of himself the part of it in which he succeeds. He does not accomplish what he wishes, and does accomplish what he does not wish.

It has always been the boast of the absolute philosophical sceptic that no opponent can refute him. It is so far true. There can be no direct demonstrative contradiction of a scepticism which is content to justify universal doubt simply by the possibility of such doubt. Whatever answers be given to it, whatever reasons be urged against it, must fall under what it questions, seeing that it refuses to acknowledge the



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truth of the conditions on which all intelligence and inference depend. All thought must rest on first principles—on truths which have their evidence in themselves, and which, in order to be believed, require only to be apprehended. If a man deny them, you cannot deductively prove them to him, nor can you prove anything to him, for they are the conditions of all rational and sane thinking. If, when you appeal to one of those truths, a man, without endeavouring to show that it is intrinsically untrue or doubtful, simply says, “I do not choose to admit it,” “I find it possible to reject it, and therefore I reject it,” there is no further argument possible between you and him in the direct line. But can the agnostic fairly claim this as a triumph? Assuredly not. It merely means that rather than be considered a bad reasoner, he is willing to accept an absurd premiss; that, in order to justify an argument which implies the falsity of a self-evident principle, he will not hesitate to adopt the falsity as a truth. But every alleged logical victory of this kind must be deemed a real rational defeat by every truly reasonable mind. It is the triumph of will over reason, the substitution of will for reason.

Assent to first principles is not, as the agnostic would have us suppose, *mere belief* or *blind trust*. It is an *acceptance of self-evidence*, just and rational in itself, and capable of being corroborated by legitimate and adequate criteria. In withholding it, the absolute agnostic, the genuine and thorough sceptic, demands to be directly refuted, which is absurd, but

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makes no attempt directly to justify himself, although that is greatly needed. What he opposes to self-evidence is self-will. What he opposes to intuitive rational insight is intellectual caprice. He decides against reason *ab initio* without reason. In a word, his rejection of the laws of thought is an essentially arbitrary, irrational act.

### VI. ABSOLUTE AGNOSTICISM AND PRACTICAL LIFE

“By their fruits ye shall know them” is an axiom which holds good of propositions and theories as well as of things and persons. All truths tend to good, and all errors to evil. A theory or system which cannot be acted on is one which is greatly to be distrusted. How stands it in this respect with agnosticism? Can it be made to harmonise with the requirements of practical life, or with the nature of man as a being formed for action? The answer must be in the negative. Agnosticism is not a system which will work. Its relation to practice is unnatural and unsatisfactory, and it is inconsistent with any acceptable theory of duty and conduct.

Both our physical and moral life have imperative practical requirements with which every consistently and completely agnostic theory, either of doubt or disbelief, must inevitably come into conflict. Man is born to act, and must act on pain of death. In acting he comes under obligations which he must fulfil, otherwise conscience will pronounce him deserving of contempt and punishment. With this state of

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things, neither absolute disbelief nor absolute doubt can be got to accord. If there be no truth, there can be no moral truth. If reason be untrustworthy, its ethical decisions can have no claim to be trusted. If we have no right to believe, we can have no ground to act. If total suspension of judgment be the proper rule of intelligence, total cessation from action must be the proper rule of will. Here agnosticism seems in presence of an insuperable difficulty, and certainly of one which has never been surmounted.

Some have evaded it by saying that man was so self-contradictory a being that this additional contradiction need not be taken into account, or should be credited to human nature instead of charged against the agnostic representation of that nature. This may pass as a joke, but it cannot be allowed as an argument. Any view of the human intellect which exhibits it as essentially self-contradictory is already, *ipso facto*, highly suspicious; but all suspicions against it receive strong confirmation when it is seen to be in opposition also to the implications of instinct and appetite, of affection and duty, and to be, in fact, such as would paralyse the entire emotive and active nature, from its lowest physical prompting to its highest spiritual aspiration.

There are others who have, in substance, said: Adhere to agnosticism as a theory, but do as others do in practice. Conform to common thought and the ordinary modes of life as regards conduct, follow the promptings of nature, listen to what sounds as the voice of duty, while sceptical as to the grounds and

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worth of human judgments. Doubt or disbelieve all that is received by human beings as true and certain, yet be as prompt as others to decide and as energetic to execute when action is required. That means, however, that the best thing which an agnostic can do is to act as if agnosticism were not true. And, in fact, the shrewdest and most ingenuous of agnostics have confessed that they did so, and could not help doing so, in regard to the affairs of common life. But why, then, suppose that their theory can be acted on at all? If they cannot act on it as regards ordinary things, how can they assume that it may be acted on as regards higher things? If a theory which pretends to be universal will plainly not apply—not work—in one sphere, is it not likely to be equally at fault in others? Is not the proper inference that it will work nowhere; that as regards action or conduct it completely breaks down; that it is to be trusted neither as to our lower nor higher life—neither as to this world nor any other? Yet is it credible that thought should be so related (or unrelated) to action, truth to life?

There are agnostics who have dealt with the difficulty in question in still another way. They have entirely separated theory and conduct, so divided reason as to destroy its unity, and formed, instead of one homogeneous and harmonious philosophical doctrine, two heterogeneous and discordant ones—the one speculative and sceptical, the other practical and dogmatic. Could this procedure be justified, no further proof would be needed of the constitutional self-con-

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tradictoriness of the human intellect. But no evidence is to be found for such dualism as is alleged, or warrant for such "double book-keeping" as is adopted. The agnostics referred to have seen that they must sacrifice either their agnosticism to morality, or morality to their agnosticism; and their reverence for morality has been sufficiently strong to induce them to choose the former course as the lesser evil. They have thus made in favour of morality the greatest sacrifice which, as philosophers, they could make—the sacrifice of their philosophical principles and consistency. The moralist may commend them in consequence, but the approval of the logician cannot be expected.

Absolute agnosticism, then, owing to its intrinsic self-contradictoriness, has among other defects that of logically necessitating either a tremendous intellectual or a tremendous ethical sacrifice, or both. It must be inconsistent either with reason or duty, or both. The nearer it approaches to absoluteness, or essential universality and completeness, the more certainly will it show itself incompatible with either true science or right practice.

As I am at present dealing merely with absolute agnosticism, to have indicated in this general way that it affects the latter as well as the former may be, perhaps, all that is here strictly required. Yet it can hardly be irrelevant also to refer in a few sentences to the agnosticism which is specially directed against knowledge and certitude in morals.

There is such an agnosticism. Morality has never

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had any exceptional immunity from the assaults of sceptical criticism; nor is it likely ever to have it. The highest truth accessible to the human intellect is just the truth most in danger of being suspected and rejected by it. The impressions of sense find, as a rule, a readier assent than the dictates of conscience. When Kant assumed the moral imperative to be a limit which even a criticism that disregarded every other might be expected to recognise, he made the mistake of judging of others by what he was himself. He credited mankind, that is to say, with such a sense of the sacredness of duty as is possessed only by a few. And he forgot the teaching of experience transmitted to us by history; overlooked the historical fact that the agnosticism which questions the reality of moral distinctions is as old, and has been as prevalent, as that which throws doubt on the existence of external things, or any other form of scepticism.

Long before the Christian era there were agnostics who traced all moral beliefs to non-rational causes. The sophists and sceptics of ancient Greece—a Gorgias and Protagoras, Arcesilaos and Carneades, Ænesidemus and Agrippa, for example—were wont to expatiate on the diversity, conflict, and arbitrariness of those beliefs, and of the customs, laws, and institutions to which they had given rise, and on the impossibility of finding for them any fixed standard or sure criterion. The same must be said of the succession of sceptical thinkers from Montaigne to Hume. And agnostic attacks on the cognoscibility of aught real and regulative in morality have, perhaps, never been



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more numerous and varied than in recent times. Individualism, positivism, naturalism, sensationalism, pantheism, pessimism, and anarchism have all been prevalent during the latter half of the nineteenth century, have all shown agnostic tendencies, and have all supplied agnosticism with keenly sceptical assailants of the very bases of a real or credible ethics. The history of philosophy leaves us in no doubt at all that agnosticism as to morality is not only possible but may assume many and plausible forms. The idea of duty on which all morality rests, is as capable of being impugned as the idea of God, on which all religion rests.

Wherever a real agnosticism finds entrance ethical agnosticism may be expected to follow. A sincere agnosticism must tend towards completeness. Hence it will naturally and necessarily invade and seek to make its own the sphere of morality. And it will be especially difficult to prevent its succeeding if it be to any considerable extent of an anti-religious character, seeing that the connection between religious and moral faith, religious and moral character and conduct, is especially close and strong. Agnosticism as to the bases of either religion or morals cannot fail to spread and intensify agnosticism as to those of the other. There is, of course, no species of agnosticism so harmful as that which undermines moral principles and weakens and vitiates moral practice. But all agnosticism contributes, and anti-religious agnosticism especially, to feed and foster that form of it. Hence all agnosticism, and especially anti-religious agnosticism,

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may fairly be held to tend to the demoralisation of individuals and of societies.

For a man like Kant or Fichte, in whom the voice of conscience sounds clearly as the very voice of God, the moral law may not unnaturally seem as the strongest and surest, or even as the sole yet sufficient, barrier to sceptical doubt or denial of objective existence. It is not so inexplicable as is commonly supposed that Kant, after he had laboriously sought to show that the speculative use of reason only leads us stage after stage, through its forms, categories, and ideas, deeper and deeper into subjectivity and illusion, could yet fancy that the practical reason was sufficient to secure us a foothold on eternal reality. For by men like Kant the moral law is vividly realised as standing in far closer relationship to their very selves than the outward world does, and at the same time in a far more independent relationship. The world of the senses is to so large an extent what it is owing to the constitution of the senses that it is comparatively easy for them to regard it as wholly a creation of the mind. The moral law, on the other hand, presents itself to them as beneath and beyond sense, independent of and above them, universal and eternal, immutable and divine.

But will the generality of men, or even of philosophers, be so impressed? Experience and history clearly teach us that they will not. Convince them that their faculties are deceptive, and that the objects of sense and the contents of the positive sciences are only subjective appearances and their ideal connec-

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tions, and hopeless must it be to try to persuade them that the categorical imperative is an absolute reality and a law binding on all intelligences. Ordinary humanity will only regard moral judgments and beliefs as on a level, so far as truth and certainty are concerned, with other kinds of judgments and beliefs. Bring men to think that there is no objective truth outside of the region of morals, and, as a rule, what they will conclude is not that there is such truth there, but that there is such truth nowhere; that so-called moral knowledge must be as deceptive as all else that is called knowledge, and morality itself of no exceptional validity.

Agnosticism, then, is ethically as well as intellectually unsatisfactory. It cannot be reasonably expected to yield good fruits; to enlighten and guide practice; to invigorate, purify, or ennoble life. On the contrary, it tends to weaken and destroy all trust, even in the foundations of virtue and duty, and to produce and diffuse that sort of doubt and disbelief of which the inevitable issues are despair and desolation. A soul from which all moral faith has gone is, indeed, a soul that has lost all true good, and is itself a lost soul.

“ As music and splendour  
Survive not the lamp and the lute,  
The heart's echoes render  
No song when the spirit is mute :—  
No song but sad dirges  
Like the wind in a ruined cell,  
Or the mournful surges  
That ring the dead seaman's knell.”  
—Shelley's “ Adonais.”

## CHAPTER VI

### ON MITIGATED AND PARTIAL AGNOSTICISM AND THEIR FORMS

ABSOLUTE agnosticism may be verbally professed, but is not really credible, and cannot be consistently presented or logically defended. A universal suspension of judgment or entire negation of knowledge is not only a false but an unattainable ideal. Its realisation would be the extinction of intelligence. Some degree of faith in and knowledge of truth is as necessary to the mind as some measure of breath and air to the body. Reason can no more be sustained and exercised in a vacuum than can any of the other powers of life. Hence agnosticism has never been able to present itself in a pure and full form. Absolute agnosticism has not attained to actual existence. History shows us only more or less close approximations and more or less ingenious counterfeits of it. All known types or schemes of agnosticism have been either incomplete as to nature or extension or as to both nature and extension; in other words, all agnosticism has been either of what may be called a mitigated or a partial kind or both mitigated and partial.

That fact, however, raises the very important questions, Can agnosticism be either mitigated or limited in a legitimate and satisfactory manner? Has

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it ever been so mitigated and limited? They cannot be here quite passed over. That agnostics themselves so frequently ignore them makes it only the more necessary that non-agnostics should not, especially as any critical survey of the historic forms of agnosticism soon shows that both the mitigation and limitation have always been fruitless so far as concerned their main object, and that it is vain to endeavour to rationalise the irrational.

### I. MITIGATED AGNOSTICISM. ITS UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS

Mitigated agnosticism is invariably scepticism modified by a dogmatism in which agnostics are of all men the least entitled to indulge. Only through a surreptitious commingling of scepticism with dogmatism can any form of mitigated agnosticism be made to assume an appearance of plausibility. Continuous self-contradiction is accordingly its inevitable and predominant characteristic. That characteristic, indeed, is what distinguishes it from the consciousness, however vivid, of the necessary imperfection of human knowledge. The latter, a due sense of one's ignorance, is not only a quite legitimate but a habitually appropriate frame of mind for all mankind. No man knows anything completely—knows anything in its whole nature and in all its relations. A perfect knowledge of any object, however simple and small, is only possible on the presupposition of a perfect knowledge of the *omne scibile*,—of all truth and of

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all reality,—of God, the universe, and man,—such knowledge as can belong to God alone. The wiser a man is the more likely will he be to feel that he knows so little, and that little so superficially,—that any knowledge he may be credited with is not only nothing to boast of but hardly worthy of the name of knowledge. The words of Socrates, “I know nothing, except that I know nothing,” and those of St. Paul, “If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know,” bore in them no agnostic or sceptical meaning, but were simply somewhat paradoxical, yet apt and effective expressions, of what Socrates and St. Paul felt as to the littleness and defects of their own knowledge and of all creaturely intelligence. If treated as strictly and speculatively true they are thoroughly sceptical formulæ, and also thoroughly dogmatic formulæ. To affirm one’s entire nescience, to declare that one *knows that one knows nothing*, is to attribute to one’s self a very marvellous knowledge of a very marvellous ignorance—a kind of omniscient nescience of all one’s objects of sense, data of consciousness, beliefs, intuitions, and inferences. It is to propound in a single sentence an incredible dogmatism and an equally incredible scepticism.

An analysis and critical examination of all the forms of mitigated agnosticism which have appeared in the course of the history of philosophy would be required in order completely to prove its mitigation to have been always effected through the illegitimate combination of dogmatism with scepticism,—through



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implicit assumptions of the attainment of knowledge in order to justify explicit doubts or denials of its attainability. But manifestly I must be content with much less than full proof. I shall merely try to indicate how my readers may obtain such proof for themselves.

Both the merits and defects of agnosticism, of course, show themselves in its history. But it is only with its defects that we are now concerned, and indeed only with such defects as are so inherent in it and characteristic of it as to appear in every stage of its history. Although those defects, however, may be found wherever agnosticism is to be found, it seems desirable to seek and take note of them as near to the rise of agnosticism as possible. But it was in Greece that agnosticism, under the name of scepticism, first appeared in distinct forms. In the oriental world it was only enveloped and involved in ontological and theological creeds. Let us turn our eyes therefore to ancient Greek scepticism. In its oldest forms we may easily trace all the root-errors of the most modern English, French, and German agnosticism.

The doubts and questionings of the Pyrrhonians, as the earliest Greek sectarians of scepticism were called, seem to have been bold, radical, and wide-reaching. Yet their teaching was largely modified by manifestly dogmatic assumptions, and largely dependent on them for what plausibility it possessed. This can be easily shown by a brief and summary statement of what they were.

1. The Pyrrhonians, then, did not doubt or dis-

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believe that human life had a chief end; that that end could be known; that they themselves knew what it was; and that they also knew how it was to be attained. On the contrary, they thought and acted as if those four closely connected yet distinguishable assumptions were positive and reliable facts. It was owing to their faith in them that they advised their contemporaries not to trouble themselves in the vain search of what they held to be unattainable,—knowledge and truth. Pyrrhonism was professedly a practical philosophy,—one which undertook to guide men to the possession of the chief good, the highest satisfaction of their nature. Yet it was also a reasoned refusal to allow that knowledge was attainable. The self-contradiction is obvious. The assumptive and positive portion of Pyrrhonian teaching was clearly inconsistent with the sceptical and negative portion of it, and with the maintenance of a philosophy of doubt or nescience. How could, how did, such self-contradiction originate? Largely at least from a crude and erroneous belief that knowing and doing, true thought and right practice, are separable in a way and to an extent altogether incompatible with the spiritual unity of the human mind and of human life. The mind is indivisible into contrasted or unconnected departments, and its life is a process in which all its energies and activities are combined with a view to co-operation. Knowing is itself a kind of doing. The doing which is without knowing is automatic, mechanical, or instinctive action, not properly human action. Intellectual activity is sustained by

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volitional energy, and volitional energy is guided by intellectual illumination. Knowledge, as Bacon says, is power. Neither physical nor moral ends can be attained when causes, conditions, and laws are ignored. What is man's chief good is itself a question for enlightened reason to answer, and even a difficult question which admits of and has received many and conflicting answers. If we do not know what is true how can we know what is good, and still more what is best? If all else be doubtful, what right can we have to assume anything ethical to be certain?

The same kind of assumptiveness and self-contradictoriness which has thus been referred to as characteristic of Pyrrhonism has constantly reappeared in the subsequent history of scepticism. The scepticism of the Academics and Empiricists of ancient Greece is marked by a similarly unnatural severance of knowledge and practice as that of the Pyrrhonians, although the Academics introduced probability and the Empiricists experience with a view to bridge over the chasm and to present some appearance of rational basis for conduct. The Neo-Sceptics of Greece, on the other hand, preferred to build on the original Pyrrhonian basis. The majority of the avowed sceptics of modern times to whom I have referred in chap. iii. were generally called Pyrrhonians, and did not regard themselves as wronged by being so called. Ritschlian divines separate religion from knowledge in much the same way as Pyrrhonian sceptics separated the conduct of life from knowledge. Their representation of religion as dependent only on judg-

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ments of value, and independent of any knowledge of objective reality or of relationships which can be expressed in existential or theoretical judgments, is assuredly Pyrrhonianism in theology.

2. There were other assumptions involved in the Pyrrhonian demand for suspension of judgment. For instance, Pyrrhonians did not doubt of knowing phenomena, but held that they knew only phenomena. Nor did they doubt of knowing realities, but denied that they knew them. Neither as to things in themselves nor as to appearances of things was their attitude of mind one of mere suspension of judgment or of pure doubt. On the contrary, as to the former, it was one of negation, denial of the knowledge or knowability of things themselves; and as to the latter, one of affirmation, of belief that appearances only are known. Thus the Pyrrhonian doubt had reference merely to the existence and nature of things in themselves, of realities which do not appear. But on what did such doubt itself rest? Was it on either a sceptical or a rational judgment? Manifestly not, but on the dogmatic and absurd assumption that realities and phenomena, things and appearances of things, were entirely distinct, absolutely separate, and known by Pyrrhonians themselves to be so. If things in themselves are things which appear, there can be no more reason for doubting of things in themselves than for doubting of things which appear. And if there be no things in themselves, none which do not or may not appear, doubt as to so-called "things in themselves" must be doubt about nothing at all—objectless, mo-

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tiveless, reasonless doubt. To doubt of realities while believing in phenomena assumes a distinction between them, and enough of knowledge to draw the distinction. There cannot be intelligent or even intelligible doubt about things altogether unintelligible, such as the Pyrrhonians pronounced things in themselves to be.

It was not Pyrrhonians, or sceptics of any kind, who first represented the distinction between reality and appearance, being and becoming, the noumenal and phenomenal, as an absolute one. Like all that is distinctive of scepticism, it sprang from the exclusiveness and exaggerations of dogmatism. In Greece it was the conflict between the Eleatics and Heracliteans which brought it into prominence. Plato gives it a large place in his teaching, and threw such a glory and a charm over it as to secure for it a remarkable history even far beyond the confines of scepticism. The sceptics have had only to adopt and apply it in a special way. They have done so with the most instructive unanimity. There is, perhaps, no form of developed scepticism which does not depend on the distinction in question as one of its chief supports. It is one of the main pillars of Kantianism, and of all post-Kantian agnostic theories. Even agnostics, indeed, seem now too ashamed of it to venture to emphasise or formulate it; but they have not had the courage to discard it, or been able to show that they can dispense with it. Their sceptical doubts and denials still depend on it, and presuppose its intelligibility and accuracy. Mr. Alfred Sidgwick, the most

philosophical representative of scepticism in England, holds in the present day that reality cannot be known, just owing to his distinguishing reality from appearance in the preposterous way which Pyrrho did in the age of Alexander the Great. And such a distinction! The distinction between Reality which does not and cannot appear, and Appearance in which nothing really appears. How can any one reasonably believe either in such Reality or in such Appearance? It would seem as if agnostics must believe in both.

3. The separation and contrast of reality and appearance naturally implied another separation and contrast. Granted that reality and appearance were so apart and unlike in themselves, they could not be united in or alike to the mind—could not, for instance, be equally objects of knowledge. If realities only be known, appearances must be below knowledge; and if appearances only be known, realities must be above knowledge. Accordingly, the Greek dogmatists, who dis severed and contrasted reality and appearance, noumenon and phenomenon, gave to the words knowledge and belief (*ἐπιστήμη* and *δόξα*) the significations required to express the correspondent mental states. In other words, they termed *knowledge* only what they held to be apprehended by pure reason and demonstratively certain, and called *opinion* all that presented itself to sense, and was consequently viewed by them as in contact merely with semblance or illusion. The sciences which are now called positive, and which are so often spoken of as the only sciences, Plato and the speculative philosophers of antiquity



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did not regard as worthy of the name of science. They held all sense-perceptions and ordinary judgments to be essentially different from true cognition, and relegated them to the limbo of mere opinion. The sceptics accepted the same distinction between knowledge and opinion, but they made another application of it, and drew from it an opposite inference. They concluded that knowledge was unattainable; that truth, if there be such a thing, must be beyond the reach of the human mind; and that men should be content to do without them, making the most of such substitutes for them as appearances, probabilities, and experiences, and seeking only to gain practical ends.

The Greek sceptics, however, who, from Pyrrho to Sextus Empiricus, represented knowledge as beyond human reach, either did not define knowledge in any reasonable way or assumed that there was no knowledge short of absolute knowledge, and no valid proof of any kind unless there was some one perfectly clear and unquestionable criterion of truth. Modern sceptics have proceeded in the same way, but it is a misleading one. Men may have true knowledge without being infallible. It is easy to show that our senses are often at fault. Their illusions and the fallacies of inference associated with them are innumerable. Hence one of the arguments on which sceptics have placed the greatest reliance. Yet all the errors and contradictions which can be fairly charged on the judgments of sense are very far from disproving that all our senses yield us a large amount of real knowl-

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edge. The inference to the contrary drawn from their defects and errors is excessive and fallacious. The illusions and contradictions adduced are exceptional; and, further, they are explicable, and so explicable as to cease to have any argumentative value against the existence of truth and the reality of knowledge whenever they are naturally accounted for. If we can discover the causes of either our erroneous perceptions or inferences, the scepticism which has based itself on those perceptions or inferences is left without foundation and must fall. Their causes always can be discovered. All that the sceptical argumentation referred to really proves is that the search for truth is a serious affair, one which requires exertion, circumspection, and method.

4. Pyrrhonism also assumed that there was in man a reason capable of weighing reasonings regarding things, and of determining what weight ought to be assigned to them. Pyrrho himself, in order that he might overtly deny that man had such a reason, required to reason as if he had it, and thus also to mitigate his open scepticism with secret dogmatism. The assumption was manifestly implied in his argument that he could neither legitimately affirm nor deny the reality of motion because the reasoning of Parmenides that there is no motion, and the reasoning of Heraclitus that all is motion, being of equal but contrary weight, balance and annul each other. In order to be entitled so to infer that the two opposite views were supported with reasons of equal weight and worth he must have had a power competent to weigh and appre-

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ciate reasons aright. The assertion that reasoning yields contradictory conclusions which are supported by proofs of the same cogency in reality presupposes its veracity and validity, although meant to discredit it. Further, it is an assertion which ought not to be dogmatically affirmed, but which requires to be justified in each and every instance. A universal conclusion cannot be rationally inferred from a particular case. And there is obviously a special and tremendous improbability in supposing that reason, the general validity of which is implied in all reasoning, will uniformly proceed to contradict and stultify itself in particulars.

That reason thus contradicts and stultifies itself the agnostic has often asserted but never proved. Pyrrho obviously did no more than give the assertion a kind of plausibility by confounding the contradictions of one-sided and reckless reasoners with the contradictions of reason itself. He had no right to infer because Parmenides had argued that there was no motion and Heraclitus that all was motion, and the arguments of the one seemed to him to be just as good or just as bad as the arguments of the other, that reason necessarily falls into self-contradiction when applied to investigate the nature of motion. Grant that the opposing arguments of Parmenides and Heraclitus are equal, and all that can be fairly deduced is that Parmenides and Heraclitus contradict each other. To conclude that therefore reason contradicts itself is a leap of logic quite unwarranted. The more natural view is that both Parmenides and Heraclitus

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have erred ; that they have proceeded from inadequate or false conceptions of motion ; that their respective findings, " there is no motion " and " all is motion," are alike extravagant ; that we should be content to affirm that " there is some motion," so that the perception of motion is not a mere perception without object, but, under normal conditions, a real perception of an object—*i.e.*, the perception of a real object. If this view be correct, reason must be held to be consistent both with itself and with experience, where the sceptic most confidently ascribes to it self-contradiction and unconformity with experience.

Arcesilaos and Carneades, I must add, reasoned in the same way and with the same intent as Pyrrho. Ænesidemus and Agrippa placed the argument from the contrariety of judgments among the so-called sceptical tropes. Montaigne, Le Vayer, and Bayle made constant use of it. It reappeared in Kant's doctrine of antinomies ; and it is very conspicuous in the agnosticism of Hamilton, Mansel, and in various other nineteenth-century forms of scepticism.

5. I shall mention yet another dogmatic assumption in Pyrrhonism—namely, the assumption that such doubt as it inculcated would free men from the cares and fears of life, and secure them mental tranquillity. What warrant was there for that assumption ? None, so far as either reason or experience shows. The great mass of our cares and fears, our pains and sorrows, have their sources not in things in themselves, but in what things are or may be to us ; not in so-called realities, unknown and unknowable

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through experience, but in such as do or may appear in the actual or possible phenomena of experience. Who troubles himself about fire and water in themselves? Yet how troublesome may be the fire which burns and the water which drowns?

The preceding observations on Pyrrhonism may suffice to show that, so far from being pure, complete, absolute scepticism, it was very largely indeed a scepticism dependent on and made up of dogmatism; a system mitigated or modified through the mixture of sceptical with dogmatical elements, and consequently one composed of incongruous and discordant elements. An analysis of most other forms of scepticism would show them to be of the same character; not less full of dogmatic assumptions, nor less self-contradictory and untrue. I must leave, however, my readers to institute for themselves any further analysis of the kind which they may deem necessary. It will now, I hope, be enough for me at this point to consider how Hume has treated the question of the relation of mitigated to absolute agnosticism.

### II. HUME ON MITIGATED AND ABSOLUTE SCEPTICISM

Hume, in the essay entitled "Of the Academical, or Sceptical Philosophy," has clearly defined his attitude both to absolute and mitigated agnosticism by professing himself to be not a Pyrrhonian but an Academic sceptic. Pyrrhonism was the term he employed to denote absolute scepticism. It had often been so used before, and has not infrequently been so

## HUME ON PYRRHONISM

used since. For such use of it there is, however, no proper historical warrant. Pyrrhonism, as I have already shown in this chapter, was not absolute scepticism. There is no evidence even of its having been a nearer approximation to such scepticism than Academic scepticism was. On the contrary, the documentary testimony seems to prove that the scepticism of the Pyrrhonists was much less radical and complete than that of the Academics. M. Brochard has very plausibly, and perhaps justly, maintained that the so-called "Pyrrhonian suspension of judgment" was not taught by Pyrrho, but appropriated by those who called themselves his disciples, from Arcesilaos or Carneades, who undoubtedly inculcated such suspension of judgment as to knowledge. The great concern of Pyrrho was that men should live conformably to the chief end of life, and his scepticism seems to have had its source mainly in his aversion to speculation and sophistry as incompatible with such a life.

In the essay "Of the Academical or Sceptical Philosophy," Hume indicates the grounds on which the absolute sceptic challenges the worth of belief in the existence of an external world, in the certainty of mathematical demonstration, and in moral evidence, and implies throughout that no rational refutation of them is to be found. At the same time he admits that although absolute scepticism cannot be refuted, it will not, and should not, be accepted. "Its principles may flourish and triumph in the schools, but they must vanish like smoke in real life."

"A Pyrrhonian," he says, "cannot expect that his



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philosophy will have any constant influence on the mind; or, if it had, that its influence would be beneficial to society. On the contrary, he must acknowledge, if he will acknowledge anything, that all human life must perish, were his principles universally and steadily to prevail. All discourse, all action, would immediately cease, and men remain in a total lethargy till the necessities of nature, unsatisfied, put an end to their miserable existence. It is true so fatal an event is very little to be dreaded. Nature is always too strong for principle. And though a Pyrrhonian may throw himself or others into a momentary amazement and confusion by his profound reasoning, the first and most trivial event in life will put to flight all his doubts and scruples, and leave him the same in every point of action and speculation with the philosophers of every other sect, or with those who never concerned themselves in any philosophical researches. When he awakens from his dream he will be the first to join in the laugh against himself, and to confess that all his objections are mere amusement, and can have no other tendency than to show the whimsical condition of mankind, who must act and reason and believe; though they are not able, by their most diligent inquiry, to satisfy themselves concerning the foundation of these operations, or to remove the objections which may be raised against them."

Absolute scepticism, then, according to Hume, is excessive, and can be in itself neither durable nor useful. It may, however, he thinks, in part give rise

## HUME ON MITIGATED SCEPTICISM

to two very desirable species of mitigated scepticism—the first being a degree of doubt and caution and modesty in all kinds of scrutiny and decision, and the second being the limitation of our inquiries in such respects as are best adapted to the natural capacity of the human understanding. A tincture of universal scepticism—a certain sense of the universal perplexity and confusion inherent in human nature—may, he considers, be serviceable in abating the pride and obstinacy and self-confidence of dogmatists, and in inducing men to avoid all distant and high inquiries, and to confine their judgments to common life, and to such objects as fall under daily practice and experience.

“Those who have once,” Hume says, “been thoroughly convinced of the force of the Pyrrhonian doubt, and of the impossibility that anything but the strong power of natural instinct could free us from it, will never be tempted to go beyond common life, so long as they consider the imperfection of those faculties which they employ, their narrow reach, and their inaccurate operations.” Again, he asks, “While we cannot give a satisfactory reason why we believe, after a thousand experiments, that a stone will fall or fire burn, can we ever satisfy ourselves concerning any determination which we may form with regard to the origin of worlds, and the structure of nature, from and to eternity?”

No reasoning, he then argues, except abstract reasoning, concerning quantity and number, and experimental reasoning, concerning matter of fact and

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existence, can contain anything but sophistry and illusion.

Hume's own scepticism, then, is professedly a mitigated scepticism, but one which is so far founded on the absolute scepticism which he rejects as excessive. His rejection of absolute scepticism is not rested on reason, but on instinct, common-sense, practical incredibility. The absolute sceptic is held by him to have reason, so far as can be made out, on his side. Hume had, in other words, according to his own explicit confession and declaration, nothing to urge against what he calls excessive scepticism but an instinct which he alleges can be proved to be irrational, and the evil consequences which would flow from admitting as true what he holds cannot be shown to be false.

If Dr. Thomas Reid—his most effective Scottish opponent—had merely appealed in refutation of such scepticism to blind instinct or to common-sense in its vulgarest and not in its philosophical acceptation, he would have met it in the only way in which Hume met it, or professed to think it could be met. Of course, Reid was not content so to meet it. He did not believe that any of the original instincts or original principles of human nature could be shown to be contrary to reason. He held, and tried to prove, that it was only by false reasonings that reason could be represented as contradicting either itself or instinct. He may or may not have successfully maintained his position; but surely the position itself is incomparably superior to that of Hume, who holds absolute ag-

## HUME'S OWN SCEPTICISM

nosticism alone reasonable, and yet quite incredible—who acknowledges that were he faithfully to follow reason he must be an absolute agnostic, yet that, in order not to be ludicrous, he must yield to a blind instinct, or, in other words, prefer unreason to reason. When a philosopher tells us that the state of man is a condition thus “whimsical,” we ought not readily to admit that he is entitled to speak for any one except himself. He, owing to his agnosticism, may be in that condition, but the “whimsicality” of his situation may be entirely due to the irrationality of his agnosticism. That agnosticism may be a dream, and he may only have to awaken from it to find himself in a world of light and order, where sound reason is never at variance with healthy instinct.

It is further to be observed that absolute scepticism, according to Hume, would, if accepted, put an end to all discourse and to all action. In his opinion, if the sceptic were to follow his reasonings to their legitimate conclusion, and then seriously to adopt that conclusion, he would soon perish. In other words, he held a view directly opposed to that of those who maintain that even if scepticism were to justify its doubts and negations, and to get the validity of its arguments acknowledged, ordinary life would be quite unaffected. He did not think that a merely phenomenal world would have the same influence as a real world on any one who believed it to be merely phenomenal; he thought it could only have the same influence on those who were not thoroughly awakened out of their dream that it was real. Those who suppose that they hold his doctrine, and yet censure in

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his opponents an opinion which he so explicitly held, should find in this matter for reflection. Are they not meaning by phenomena realities? Is their phenomenal sun, for example, simply a mental impression, or a group of such impressions, or an idea derived therefrom, or is it not a real body some ninety-four millions of miles away from them, and from every impression which it is possible for them to have? Hume was not so unwise as to fancy that in the view of a consistent agnosticism the mind can get a hairsbreadth beyond itself. He knew that it must deny the objectivity of space, the validity of causality, the reality of substances, and that these external phenomena could not be reasonably held to be the equivalents of realities, but only of illusions.

Hume represents absolute scepticism as logically and legitimately leading to the mitigated scepticism which he recommends. But in that he obviously errs. Absolute scepticism neither acknowledges nor contains nor yields any measure. Mitigation and limitation are contrary to its nature; it can only be mitigated and limited by being so far successfully refuted. How can a sense of the universal perplexity and confusion inherent in human nature produce merely care and caution and modesty in reasoning? Why, if the conviction involved in that sense be correct, no care, caution, or modesty in reasoning can in the least secure that reasoning will reach truth. Reason, according to the absolute sceptic, must necessarily fail to attain knowledge; and, according to Hume himself, must, even when exercised faultlessly and to

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the full, lead to conclusions which can neither be believed nor acted on. With true criticism, modesty and moderation, caution and carefulness, must ever be closely allied; but they have no natural connection with the scepticism which teaches that reason is essentially unreasonable, and that the whole constitution and condition of mankind are essentially absurd.

Nor can absolute scepticism logically warrant the limitation of reason to any particular sphere. Indeed it cannot, perhaps, warrant any conclusion, as it implies the worthlessness of logic; but if any conclusion may be inferred from it, it must be not the propriety of limiting but of wholly suppressing reasoning and research. If our rational faculty is essentially incapable of attaining truth, it will not do to say that we must not in the exercise of it go beyond common life. What we must say is, let us not employ it at all. The assumption that reason is valid in any sphere implies that it is not essentially incapable of attaining truth, and logically forbids our excluding it from any sphere, until we have proved it powerless within that sphere. And such proof must be furnished by reason itself acting in accordance with its own constitutional laws.

We have no right, so far as reason and philosophy are concerned, to discourage curiosity and research in any direction; they must be free to turn to any question. We have a right only to insist on thoroughly testing their reports. Things remote from us are often more easily answered than those which are close to us. It is often only in things very far away



that we find the explanation of things near at hand. We know that a stone falls and at what rate it falls, but not why it falls,—we know, that is, the fact of gravitation and its law, but not its cause; and long before we know the why or cause of gravitation, familiar although it be as a fact and certain as we are of its law, we may have a scientific proof that the present physical constitution of things had an origin at an approximately assignable date. Indeed, some of the most eminent scientists of Europe hold that they have already found in Fourier's theory of heat a basis for a strictly scientific inference as to the origin of worlds, the very question which Hume thought it especially hopeless to discuss.

Absolute agnosticism, then, does not lead to a mitigated agnosticism such as Hume professed and recommended to others. His agnosticism, however, logically emerges and issues at all points into absolute agnosticism. To admit that reason is on the side of absolute agnosticism is to admit that so long as you follow reason only—that whenever you allow yourself to yield to the guidance of reason without bias or caprice—you are bound to be an absolute agnostic. It is to grant that whenever you have the sincerity and courage to philosophise with freedom and thoroughness, you will not mitigate, modify, or limit your agnosticism. And it must be said, I think, of Hume, that in his philosophising on fundamental questions he was thus true to himself by being thoroughly agnostic. The agnosticism at which he arrived implies (as I have endeavoured to show in chap. iii.) that all

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that seems knowledge of existence is not really so; that belief is not essentially distinct from imagination; that substances are reducible to collections of ideas, time and space to subjective conceptions, the causal connection to habitual association; reason to custom; that science has no principles, and religion no satisfactory grounds. The agnosticism which goes thus far ought to go farther. Any mitigating element which may be claimed to be in it has obviously no right to be there, and will but slightly alter its general character or affect its general influence. Virtually and implicitly such agnosticism is absolute.

### III. PARTIAL OR LIMITED SCEPTICISM: ITS FORMS AND THEIR INTER-RELATIONS

Partial or limited agnosticism—agnosticism incomplete as regards extension—is more prevalent than either absolute or mitigated agnosticism. Like mitigated agnosticism it always shows itself incapable of justifying its own incompleteness. The arguments which it employs against the species of knowledge and certitude that it rejects are as applicable to the species that it accepts. All its weapons may be turned against itself. It never clears itself of self-contradiction.

There are various forms of partial or limited agnosticism, and they may be distributed or classified in more ways than one. I must distribute them with a view to the work I have in hand, a treatment of agnosticism in relation to religion. It is with the agnosti-

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cism which directly refers to religion that I have mainly to do; it is it which I must throughout keep in view. And yet it is impossible, and were it possible it would be unwise, to deal with it exclusively, seeing that the agnosticism which has no special reference to religion has in all its forms and varieties a general and indirect reference to the agnosticism directly occupied with religion.

Hence I distribute partial or limited agnosticism into: (*A*) agnosticism which has a special reference to religion, and (*B*) agnosticism which has not such a reference.

*A.* The agnosticism which has a special reference to religion is of two kinds. It is either—

1. An agnosticism which opposes religion and seeks to discredit and destroy it,—anti-religious (anti-theological) agnosticism;

- or 2. An agnosticism which aims at the support and defence of religion,—religious (theological) agnosticism.

*B.* The agnosticism which has no special reference to religion may be subdivided thus:—

1. The agnosticism which originates in overhasty and ambitious theorising, and is inseparable from the systems of speculation to which such theorising gives rise.

2. The agnosticism which displays itself in given departments of knowledge or regions of inquiry.

3. Agnosticism as to particular powers of mind or principles and conditions of thought.

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And 4. Agnosticism as to the ultimate objects of knowledge.

4. Agnosticism must not be supposed to have necessarily any special reference to religion. It may have no more a special reference to religion than to various other things, and may have a special reference to other things when it has none to religion. It may be neither religious nor anti-religious, theological nor anti-theological. Still less is it to be assumed that the agnosticism which is specially related to religion can only be antagonistically related to it. To identify agnostics with atheists or anti-theists, or to represent them as irreligious and impious, is to misrepresent and calumniate a large section of them. Many persons who may justly be called agnostics have a right to be regarded as sincere believers in God, and even as convinced and earnest Christians. Agnosticism has been often employed honestly and zealously for the defence of theistic and Christian faith. It has been so employed both by philosophers and theologians, both by Catholics and Protestants.

No species of agnosticism, however, is unrelated to its genus. No agnosticism with a special reference or limited sphere is without reference to the agnostic idea, spirit, and aim. On the contrary, every kind of agnosticism tends towards agnostic completeness. Agnosticism in any form is of the nature of agnosticism in every form, and whether in peace or at war with other forms is certain of contributing to the diffusion of the agnostic spirit and the strength of the agnostic movement. Agnosticism cannot be got

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rid of by the help of agnosticism. Science, philosophy, and religion are all sure to suffer when they enter into alliance with agnosticism of any kind.

There is a religious and an anti-religious agnosticism, but both are hurtful to religion: the former not less so than the latter. Religious agnosticism has had among its advocates men of ardent piety, of persuasive eloquence, and of remarkable dialectical subtlety, who have thought that they could make scepticism the shield and sword of religion. Accordingly, they have striven zealously to discredit human reason and secular knowledge, and represented those who could not recognise the wisdom of so doing as rationalists and irreligious. But their labour has been in vain; they have never succeeded in justifying their procedure at the bar of reason; and experience and history certify that although attempts of the kind referred to may have a brief notoriety, their failure is sure soon to become evident. The alliance of scepticism as to reason and science with dogmatism as to faith and religion, is thoroughly unnatural and irrational; and it is not religion, or even religious scepticism, but anti-religious scepticism, or scepticism pure and simple, which always is and must be the chief gainer by it. Ardent religious agnostics have not infrequently become ardent anti-religious agnostics. They have made many more unbelievers than believers in religion.

Religious agnostics try to further the cause of religion by labouring to discredit reason with reasonings which can have no validity unless reason is trust-

## RELIGIOUS, ANTI-RELIGIOUS AGNOSTICISM

worthy. Anti-religious agnostics are, perhaps, less manifestly inconsistent, but they can only give any semblance of plausibility to their scepticism as to the attainability of religious truth by the employment of arguments which do not tell against religious truth alone—arguments of which the conclusions cannot be reasonably confined within the sphere of religion. Their reasonings are mostly as applicable against what anti-religious agnostics themselves accept as genuine knowledge and strict science as against the religious knowledge and theological science which they declare to be delusion and pseudo-science. They are mostly, in fact, substantially the same reasonings which have been employed by agnostics for more than two thousand years against every, or almost every, species of knowledge. They are arguments, that is to say, of which the conclusion, were they applied without prejudice or partiality, would be absolute agnosticism.

*B.* There are, however, as I have indicated, many forms of agnosticism which have no special reference to religion; which are neither directly favourable nor directly hostile to it; neither specifically religious nor anti-religious, theological nor anti-theological. But although they have not a special reference to religion they have a general one, although not a direct an indirect one. And they have all the same sort of general and indirect reference to it; all affect it in the main in the same way; are all on the whole unfavourable and injurious to it. Religion should be wholly true, and can only be profited by what is true, whereas



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agnosticism as such, however much truth may be conjoined with it in particular minds or systems, is an "ism" which is not true, and cannot benefit religion. That is a fact which cannot be too thoroughly realised.

1. *One class of the forms of agnosticism which have no special reference to religion originates in faulty philosophising.*

The varieties of agnosticism within it are corollaries or complements of all the narrow, extreme, over-ambitious speculative theories which pretend to explain the universe of being and becoming with inadequate means and in inappropriate ways. Such theories naturally lead to agnostic conclusions as to the grounds of religion. When philosophy and religion are both of a comprehensive, reasonable, and self-consistent character, there can be no conflict, there can only be harmony and mutual helpfulness between them. But when a philosophy has none of these qualities, it is most likely to come into collision with religion, and to take up an antagonistic attitude to it.

A philosophy which maintains that *knowledge is only of things we see*, and that *matter is the one sole ultimate reality*, cannot logically concede that there is religious knowledge or spiritual reality properly so called. To a consistent materialist religion cannot fail to seem an illusion, and theology merely a kind of agnosticism. His philosophical theory must have an anti-theological agnostic supplement. I do not infer from this that every materialist must be an atheist (an anti-theistic agnostic). I am quite aware that there have been theistic and even Christian mate-

rialists, of the sincerity of whose religious faith and the genuineness of whose piety fair-minded men could have no doubt. I am quite willing to grant that Dr. Priestley was a better Christian than Bishop Horsley, who enlisted against him "the bad passions of men, and the cruel prejudices of party." To question, however, the consistency of a man's thinking is one thing, and to deny his sincerity or piety is another. Philosophers like other men, and materialists like other philosophers, may lapse into what are called "happy inconsistencies." But "happy inconsistencies" are always exceptional cases. As a rule, a materialistic philosophy will not arrive at spiritualistic or religious conclusions; on the contrary, it will almost always be found associated with an anti-theological agnosticism. It was so in ancient times, and is so now. During the last half century we have seen materialism and agnosticism closely conjoined in active hostility to religion in every European country.

The philosophical theories known as *sensism*, *empiricism*, *phenomenalism*, and *positivism* are akin to materialism, although distinguishable from it, and like materialism they all lead to varieties of scepticism of a nature conformed to their own. There is also *subjectivism*, a subjective or idealistic scepticism, just the opposite of materialistic scepticism, but not less antagonistically agnostic towards religious truth. Its full logical outcome is the form of scepticism known as *solipsism*. All these theories are agnostic, and also anti-religious and anti-theological in tendency.

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2. *A second class of the forms of agnosticism which have not a special or direct but only a general and indirect reference to religion contains those which are associated with particular departments of inquiry.*

There is no science which may not be, or which even has not been, subjected to sceptical criticism and declared unworthy of the name of knowledge.

(a) *The opinion that mathematics at least has been unchallenged* is a vulgar error. The logical perplexities involved in its fundamental conceptions had occupied the thoughts of some of the Greek philosophers even before the days of Pyrrho; and there is no reason, so far as I am aware, for supposing that any of the Greek sceptics considered it entitled to immunity from their attacks. Sextus Empiricus was probably a generally accurate representative of their views when, in his *Pyrrhonic Institutes*, he questioned the very possibility of demonstration (bk. ii. c. 13), and dwelt at length on the difficulties implied in the very ideas of motion, magnitude, addition and subtraction, whole and part, continuance, change, place, time, and number (bk. iii. c. 7-18); as also when, in his treatise *Against Mathematicians*, he disputed the certainty of geometry (bk. iii.), of arithmetic (bk. iv.), and of astronomy (bk. v.). Doubts and difficulties of a kind similar to those urged by Sextus—epistemological and metaphysical doubts and difficulties—are not even now all solved or eliminated; nor are they likely soon to be. Metageometry has quite recently been bringing mathematicians face to face with previously unsuspected doubts and mysteries which suggest that

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the claims even of their science may be assailed not merely from its under or empirical side but also from its upper or speculative side. In a word, absolute knowledge, absolute certainty, in a strictly absolute sense of the terms, may be argued without absurdity to be even in mathematics beyond human attainment, and the mathematical sciences themselves to be surrounded with nescience and dependent on suppositions which involve metaphysical propositions.

That conclusion, however, will not warrant *mathematical* scepticism. It means no more than that a finite intelligence cannot be an infinite intelligence, and that only to the latter can there be "no darkness at all." The mathematician may safely rest content with logical demonstration from propositions self-evident to him, and with such certainty as such demonstration gives, until he is shown that in mathematical processes the axioms are not self-evident or the inferences logical, or that there are counter-axioms as evident or counter-inferences as valid as those which he has accepted, or that there are at least clear and weighty positive *ab extra* reasons for suspecting the rationality and certainty of his science. Were mathematical agnosticism, however, thus vindicated, reason itself would be so discredited that it could not be trusted in the religious or in any other sphere. Reason would be proved to be rooted in unreason. But mathematical agnosticism cannot be thus established without anti-theological agnosticism also being established. The trustworthiness of reason is implied in the knowledge of God, and so as much a pre-

supposition of theology as of mathematics, while the trustworthiness of God is a guarantee of the trustworthiness of reason in all its normal processes and legitimate acquisitions.

*(b) Scepticism as to the possibility of physical science was prevalent in the classical and in the medieval world.*

Grecian sages generally looked with contempt on the facts with which such science deals, and saw in them no signs of law or order. Plato relegated the whole world of sense to the limbo of mere opinion, and denied that there was any science of phenomena, or that science could be reached through the study of phenomena. The scholastic divines were no wiser. Theology was so dominant in the Middle Ages that, while unlimited trust was given to all Biblical references to physical things, little interest or confidence was felt in their direct study. Hence the views of the men of those times on the subjects of which the positive sciences treat were very strange and erroneous, being largely due both to an irrational credulity and an irrational incredulity, or, in other words, to a combination of dogmatism and scepticism—of dogmatism as regarded the words of a book, and of scepticism as regarded the facts of nature. Only slowly and with difficulty,—only through protracted and painful conflicts,—have the studies occupied with natural objects become genuine sciences; and there are some who have represented the history of their progress as an exemplification of the triumph of scepticism and science over religion and theology.

## SCEPTICISM AS TO PHYSICAL SCIENCE

But it is assuredly nothing of the kind. Religion has gained as much from what has taken place as science. True theology finds strong support and rich nutriment in those emancipated sciences which are now so zealously and successfully reading and explaining the book of nature. That book is the primary, universal, and inexhaustible text-book of divine revelation, and although inadequate to satisfy all the wants of sinful man, it is, and will always be, necessary to him, not only as a physical but a spiritual being. It is the oldest and most comprehensive of the media of divine revelation, and the correct interpretation of it is only possible through the aid and instrumentality of the appropriate sciences. Hence every enlightened theologian of to-day sees in the dogmatism which would obstruct or enslave those sciences an ally of the scepticism which is an enemy both of pure religion and true theology. The more accurately and fully physical nature is investigated and explained by the sciences of nature, the more must the human mind recognise it to be pervaded by thought akin to its own; the more must the human spirit find itself "at home" therein.

(c) *Historical scepticism, otherwise known as "erudite scepticism" and "historical Pyrrhonism," belongs to the same group.*

What is distinctive of it is the extent to which it challenges the credibility of historical narrative and questions the possibility of historical science; and the conclusion at which it arrives may almost be formulated in the terms of the *bon-mot* attributed to Fon-



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tenelle, *l'histoire n'est qu'une fable convenue*. It contends that history, as an account of events, is very little to be trusted, and that a science of history cannot reasonably be looked for. Much may be said for that contention. History is rarely the record of deeds witnessed, or of words heard by historians themselves; it is to a small extent founded on direct observation. Its data are, of necessity, largely reached by reasonings and guessings far from indisputable. The history of man is known to us during only a very short portion of the time that he has been on earth. So-called ancient history is largely fabulous. Most of the classical historians were very uncritical. Medieval historians were exceedingly credulous, and often relied on forged documents. It is impossible for even the most honest, learned, and laborious historian to give a detailed account of any lengthened period, or comprehensive view of any complex portion of history, without falling into many errors. And there are few historians who are not biassed by self-interest, by prejudice, by party spirit, by the desire to be vivid, picturesque, and popular, and, in a word, by a multitude of perverting influences. It is certainly not on the side of scepticism that ordinary readers of history err. Many are ready to accept in blind faith whatever is presented to them.

There have been those, however, who may fairly be designated "historical Pyrrhonists." As typical examples of erudite scepticism may be mentioned Bayle, a main purpose of whose famous *Dictionary* was the

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suggesting of historical doubts; Father Hardouin, who maintained that the works attributed to Thucydides, Livy, and most of the so-called classical writings, as well as the chronicles and documents relating to the Franks, were forgeries; Schopenhauer, who has assailed the historical muse Clio in terms the most contemptuous and even indecent; and M. Louis Bourdeau, who, in his *L'Histoire et les Historiens*, 1888, has learnedly argued that of true history there is as yet almost none, and that the historical method should be abandoned for the statistical.

Almost the only "historical sceptics" of the present day, however, are not those who deny the possibility of discovering historical truth and presenting it in an accurate and appropriate narrative form, but those who maintain that there can be no science or scientific study of history. Their attitude towards history is very much the same as the attitude towards nature of the ancient philosophers and medieval doctors, who thought a direct study of the material world would not yield physical science. The unwisdom of it will doubtless be made evident in the same way. In fact, a science of history is manifestly in course of formation, and was never so eagerly cultivated as at present. All sociological studies are of the nature of contributions to historical science, and the last quarter of a century has probably produced more such studies than all previous centuries together. Historical science may likely enough never attain the exactness of physical science, and yet reach greater depth and fullness of knowledge. Man, just because man, is capa-

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ble of knowing more that truly deserves the name of knowledge about human nature and human history than about what is merely material or animal. He can enter more deeply into his own heart than into the nature of a stone, into the thoughts of Buddha or Plato than into the mind of an ox or sheep. He has to interpret nature by himself, not himself by nature. The human mind and its history are in themselves more intelligible than the physical world and its evolution, and may be expected when scientifically studied and philosophically interpreted to contribute more to knowledge in general and to religious knowledge in particular. Matter is the stage prepared for the drama of the spirit. There is, we may be sure, more significance in the drama than in the stage, and what that significance is will be gradually brought more fully to light. The refutation of historical scepticism may safely be left to the future. The future will not fail to undertake the task, and will accomplish it by simply marching onwards. *Solvitur ambulando.*

(d) *Another variety of the same kind of agnosticism is "ethical" agnosticism.*

It also has had a lengthened history, and has at times had considerable popularity. The diversity and contradictions of the moral judgments of mankind has always been its favourite argument. Yet it is a very inconclusive one, as it owes whatever appearance of validity it possesses to a manifest oversight, the overlooking of the comprehensive unity of principles underlying the easily explicable differences of applications and inferences. An impartial

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study of the relevant facts cannot fail to show that man is always and everywhere a moral being, and that the more truly man he becomes the more does his morality commend itself to the common conscience of mankind. Far from there being any incompatibility between a continuous moral progress and the immutability of moral truths, there is a complete harmony.

Further, all ethical scepticism is compelled to assume the ethical ideas and distinctions which it repudiates. The moral law in its essentials is not only confirmed by the common consent of mankind, but practically recognised where it is not explicitly affirmed, and spontaneously obeyed by those who logically should disobey it. How should it be otherwise? Only where there are order and reason of some kind can there be any truth; and wherever there are order and reason there must be truth, and essentially the same truth, for truth is just conformity to the order of things and the requirements of reason. All the heavenly bodies may at some time or other be inhabited by moral agents. But there can be no moral agents except in intelligible and orderly worlds, and in all such worlds the ethics of rational agents must be, like their logic and mathematics, as Dr. Paul Carus has justly argued, "in fundamentals the same."<sup>1</sup>

Obviously to the extent that ethical scepticism is a partial and exclusive scepticism, tacitly or openly claiming to be the only scepticism, it is illogical and self-contradictory. There is no good reason for confining scepticism to the sphere of morals. Nay, if

<sup>1</sup> *Fundamental Problems*, 46-52.

## MITIGATED AND PARTIAL AGNOSTICISM

consciousness, in the form of conscience, cannot be relied on, how can it be relied on in any other form? If ethical agnosticism must be accepted, how can religious agnosticism be rejected, or the claims of religious science vindicated? If scepticism as to the knowledge of ethical truth be warranted, so must scepticism as to the knowledge of religious truth. The shortest way to complete religious agnosticism is to dispute the possibility of a knowledge of God, and God must be admitted to be unknowable if ethical truth be unknowable,—if reason be unable to apprehend goodness, righteousness, and other ethical excellences. The very thought of a non-moral or immoral God is one in which no sane mind can find rest or satisfaction. It is a self-contradictory and monstrous thought. Were it a necessary or legitimate conclusion of reason, reason would be self-stultified, and neither science nor religion could be shown to be valid.

*(c) Another form of the same kind of scepticism as ethical agnosticism is metaphysical agnosticism.*

While undoubtedly prevalent, it is apt to seem even more so than it really is. The chief reason of that is that many who profess to be metaphysical agnostics do not know what metaphysics means. Obviously before a man declares metaphysics to be a pseudoscience or fancied knowledge, and that he has no faith in it,—or, in other words, before he poses as a metaphysical sceptic,—he should know what thoughtful writers on metaphysics mean by it, and should have studied the history, the chief systems, the main prob-

## MEANING OF METAPHYSICS

lems, the methods and the claims of metaphysics. But that is what comparatively few men have done. The ordinary man does not even ask what metaphysics is. The generality even of scientists are innocent of metaphysical curiosity. The majority of self-styled metaphysical sceptics have never been earnest metaphysical students. Many of them show, as I have said, that they do not even know in what sense the term metaphysics is, or ought to be, employed.

No one who does attach a reasonable meaning to the term "metaphysics" will be inclined to entertain or advocate "metaphysical agnosticism" with a light heart. Whoever understands aright what metaphysics is, and consequently what metaphysical scepticism properly signifies, must recognise such scepticism to be a most radical and far-reaching agnosticism, a form thereof assent to which must involve grave and tremendous issues.

What, then, is metaphysics? It has been suggested that no one knows what it is, and that there are as many different conceptions of it as there are independent metaphysical thinkers, or at least as there are distinct metaphysical schools. Nor need it be denied that there is some slight, although only very slight, appearance of foundation for the opinion. Metaphysicians often arrive at very different and conflicting results, and still oftener perhaps fail to arrive at any definite or positive results. There is much truth and wisdom as well as wit in De Morgan's humorous definition of metaphysics: "The science to which ignorance goes to learn its knowledge, and knowledge



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to learn its ignorance. On which all men agree that it is the key, but no two upon how it is to be put into the lock." In the course of its history the word metaphysics has been employed in very different ways; and even at the present day all who expressly treat of metaphysics do not mean by the term precisely the same thing. But, certainly, so very general an agreement as to how it should be understood has at length been arrived at that there can be no reasonable doubt as to what in the main it ought to mean. Almost without exception metaphysicians now avoid confounding metaphysical with either physical or psychical science in general, or with any of the physical or psychical sciences, and treat of it as the science or theory which concerns itself with what both underlies and overlies all the special sciences, mathematical, natural, mental, and theological; or, to express myself more precisely, which deals alike with the first principles and the last results of rational inquiry—alike with the fundamental conditions, categories, and limits of knowledge, and with the ultimate nature, relations, and laws of reality. Thus understood, it is the theory of knowing and being, or of the universal and essential in truth and existence, and includes epistemology (which should be carefully distinguished from logic and methodology) and ontology. Some metaphysicians indeed would identify it with the latter, to the exclusion of the former; but the larger view, comprehensive of both, is, I think, much to be preferred. In fact, it is practically impossible to adhere to the narrower view; impossible to act on it

## METAPHYSICAL SCEPTICISM

consistently for a single instant of time. Truth and reality are inseparable. There is no knowing without being, or being unrelated to knowing. Truth and reality, knowing and being, are throughout correlative and coincident. Epistemology and ontology are in intimate connection at every point.

If metaphysics be what has now been indicated, and what is now almost universally regarded as the only reasonable conception of it, the nature and significance of metaphysical scepticism must be at once apparent. Metaphysical scepticism is scepticism as to what is primary in rationality and knowledge; or as to what is ultimate in being and appearance; or, and this is the more consistent as well as more comprehensive view, as to what is universal and essential both in thought and existence. If understood in the first sense or reference, however, it means that there are no real or rational bases for any kind of knowledge or science; if in the second, that there are no known grounds of reality and that all appearance is illusory and inexplicable; and if in the third, that all epistemology and ontology are worthless, knowledge wholly unattainable, and existence altogether vanity. There can consequently be no deeper depth of scepticism than metaphysical scepticism. It leaves the mind with nothing to rest on or hold by. The contradictions of the senses, the contradictions of reason and reasoning, the contradictions between experience and theory, are what it appeals to in its own behalf, and these can warrant no trust in any positive truth. Thus living, moving, and having its being in self-contradic-

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tion, it can itself be a support to nothing, while it strives to undermine all the real foundations of science and philosophy. The only conclusion to which it naturally leads is the unattainability of knowledge, the incognoscibility of existence. It signifies as regards philosophy that all its problems are insoluble, and as regards the sciences that all their findings are dependent on unwarranted assumptions.

Its bearing on theology is obvious. Theology is professedly not sceptical inquiry but positive science. It rests on faith in truth, and in truth of a metaphysical nature. It seeks, believes that it finds, exhibits, and defends such truth. Metaphysical scepticism implies and includes theological scepticism, and hence necessarily combats theology and denies its right to existence. If it be true, theology is false; if theology be true, it is false. Theology is primarily and mainly knowledge of God—a knowledge which has to be attained through reason and experience, through nature and history, and, in a word, through all the ways and forms in which God has made Himself known. Metaphysical scepticism questions and denies our right to regard anything as a medium of knowledge of God. But,—

“Of God above or man below,  
What can we reason but from what we know?”

(f) *The forms of agnosticism may likewise be grouped with reference to the mental powers or principles of which the validity and veracity are disputed. Every power and principle of mind may be scepti-*

## SCEPTICISM AND THE SENSES

cally treated, and, in fact, there is not one of them which agnosticism has not at some time and in some form assailed.

To the simple and rude mind the clearest and most satisfactory of all testimony appears to be *that of the senses*. To the critical and reflective mind doubts respecting its reliability and worth necessarily suggest themselves. The seeming anomalies, the monotonous and ceaseless changes, the apparent purposelessness, the labour and sorrow, which perplexed the soul of the author of *Ecclesiastes* when he contemplated the world of the senses, also left many traces of doubt and sadness in the lines of the poets and the reflections of the sages of ancient Greece. Both Brahmanists and Buddhists regard the world of the senses as a world of illusion,—a world of which “illusion” is “the material cause.” All the chief sceptics of the Western world have disputed the credibility of the senses as witnesses to objective reality.

The so-called errors and contradictions of the senses have, of course, afforded the materials for one of the main arguments in support of distrust of their testimony. It is easy to adduce numerous instances of various kinds of phenomena which may be so called and so represented. Attentively regarded, however, all phenomena of the kind will be found to be the results either of hasty and inconsiderate inferences or of abnormal conditions of the organs of sense, and not the deliverances of sound senses properly exercised. They are self-deceptions for which not the constitution or action of men's senses are to blame but men

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themselves. *Opinionis mendacium est non oculorum.* The subjectivity of the senses has been not less relied on as an argument to justify scepticism as to their testimony. It is represented as implying the inability of the mind to apprehend really external objects. Descartes, Malebranche, Norris, Berkeley, and others, made use of it before Hume gave full and explicit expression to its implicit scepticism,—a scepticism which centred in the assumption that not things, not realities, but merely ideas or images are consciously apprehended. Those who have succumbed to such scepticism, while right in regarding sensations as indispensable to the knowledge of external objects and yet in themselves incapable of attaining or constituting it, have erred entirely in conceiving of them as existing apart from perceptive and rational concomitants, and in disbelieving that what they could not do alone they could not do when not alone. Mere sensations are mere abstractions which have no existence in any individual mind or actual experience. All real sensation is conjoined with perceptive and appetitive power, and in man at least with conception and reason. It is only an element, although an important element, of the psychical process implied in the cognition of external things.

Scepticism *as to memory* is as possible, and may be advocated as plausibly, as scepticism regarding perception. Remembrance is an act no less mysterious than vision. Of the many attempts which have been made to explain it not one has found much acceptance. There is further between its testimony and

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that of the senses a radical difference by no means in its favour. Acts of perception may be reasonably regarded as immediate and direct apprehensions of facts, and are generally so regarded. Not so acts of memory. Memory is dependent on immediate and intuitive knowledge, but cannot possess or supply it, —cannot know the past as present, the non-existent as existent. Probably no psychologist now holds Dr. Reid's view to the contrary. Recollections are never so vivid and exact as the perceptions and experiences recalled, and are generally very vague and blurred, very effaced and fragmentary, in comparison. Of all our cognitive powers, memory is the most closely conjoined with imagination, and has even been defined as "reproductive imagination." But imagination, as every one knows, changes the appearances of all that it acts on, and shows little preference for truth over error. Memory is also largely affected by the disturbing influences of external surroundings, corporeal conditions, emotions, passions, habits, &c. All experience teaches that it is exceedingly apt to play us false. Its illusions are innumerable, and even its hallucinations are of many kinds. It is habitually inaccurate in the performance even of what may be regarded as its most special function—the measurement of time. A very poor chronometer can tell more exactly the duration of a second, a minute, or an hour, than the best memory. There are certain situations in which minutes seem to us intolerably long, and others in which we hardly notice the flight of hours. In early youth years, as recalled, seem long; in old age,



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short. The entire mnemonic process—how anything whatever enters into memory and can be retained or recalled—is as yet an altogether unexplained mystery.

The facts just referred to may suffice to indicate to my readers how easy it may be, by simply dwelling on the defects and errors of memory, to get up a plausible plea for scepticism as to its trustworthiness. It is largely by such “exclusive dealing” that scepticism in all its forms is, and always has been, supported. Obviously, the method is as applicable against the credibility of any one faculty as of any other. As obviously, however, it is a fallacious method, and one by which in no case can agnosticism as to any of the faculties of mind be established. The agnosticism which bases itself exclusively on the errors and defects of any of our faculties must be, as regards even that faculty, a failure. What is overlooked or concealed in it is not destroyed, or lessened, or in any way got rid of by merely being ignored. Hence, when all that can be said to depreciate and discredit memory has been fully said, its essential veracity and inestimable value will remain intact and undiminished.

Whoever has read the “Confessions” of St. Augustine will not be likely to forget the eulogy on memory in Book x. Augustine there descants with marvellous eloquence and clear introspective vision on the spacious regions and palaces of memory; on the treasures of innumerable images of things of all sorts contained in them; of the media in and through which they have been acquired; of how they are preserved

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from loss and brought up for use ; and of how so much of heaven, earth, and sea, of the histories of men and nations, of learning, art, and science, as well as of one's own self, feelings, deeds, and experiences belong to them. Realising how divinely wonderful the gift of memory is, he sought in chapter after chapter of the book to which I refer to make others appreciate it as he felt himself constrained to do. Now let us mark this fact. In all that he has written in his elaborate eulogium of memory there is probably not a sentence which has been disproved or discredited by agnostic or any other criticism. Between the criticism and the conclusion of agnosticism as to memory there is an enormous and irrational interval. The criticism, wherever true, only indicates defects quite compatible with the essential truthfulness of memory, and with its being all that Augustine has described it to be. Even a very ordinary memory can retain, with an extraordinary degree of evidence and accuracy, a wonderful wealth of experiences and acquisitions. And in the great majority of cases in which memory fails us, it does not even so fail us as not to leave us conscious that it fails us. We remember that we have forgotten, and, as Augustine says, " we have not yet forgotten that which we remember ourselves to have forgotten." Where there is no remembrance there is utter effacement of memory, but no error or deception of memory.

Scepticism *as to reason* is another form of the same species of agnosticism. Here I would only remark that as in every other form of scepticism as to partic-

ular powers or principles of cognition there will be found associated with the excess of distrust, distinctive of it, a correlative excess of confidence in another power or principle, so is it in the case of scepticism as to reason. The chief cause of such scepticism is an exaggerated estimate of the place and function of sense in cognition. Knowledge is attempted to be traced exclusively or mainly to sensation. That, however, can only be done, or even seem to be done, by an unnatural abstraction of sense from reason, which makes sense itself impotent and untrustworthy. Mere sensation has not been shown ever to exist alone, or even to be conceivable as existing alone. And, further, mere sensation, even if it existed, would be exclusively individual and subjective; but where there is no universality or objectivity there can be no knowledge or intelligibility. To accept sensation alone as the foundation of knowledge, or knowledge to be merely transformed or associated sensations, is entirely to betray the cause of knowledge.

Having already, however, had to some extent to deal with agnosticism as to reason, and as I must necessarily have it further under consideration in the chapters which follow, I shall not dwell on it here.

In the next chapter I shall enter on the consideration of that group of forms of agnosticism which directly refer to *the objects of knowledge*.

## CHAPTER VII

### PARTIAL OR LIMITED AGNOSTICISM AS TO ULTIMATE OBJECTS OF KNOWLEDGE

THERE are forms of agnosticism distinguished from one another by the objects to which they refer. In so far as distinct from and exclusive of one another they are necessarily of a partial and limited nature, and as such they must, like the forms of mitigated or modified agnosticism, not only fail to realise but must contravene and contradict the ideal of agnosticism, which, as we have seen, must be arbitrary and inconsistent unless unlimited and universal. What Sextus Empiricus said of scepticism holds true of agnosticism: it should not be the belief of a school or sect, or a definite doctrine as to anything, but is "a certain line of reasoning," an *ἀγωγή* or movement, the *δύναμις* of so opposing in every way the appearances of sense and arguments of intelligence to each other as to produce by their equilibrium suspension of judgment. Agnosticism thus understood is a potentiality of which all the actual manifestations must be self-contradictory. That that is not an inaccurate view of it has, I trust, already been sufficiently shown.

It may be thought that as the forms of agnosticism now to be considered derive what is distinctive of them from their relationship to the objects of knowl-

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edge, our first question regarding them should be, What are the objects to which all real or supposed knowledge may be reduced, and with reference to which all partial forms of agnosticism may be distributed? There is a question, however, prior even to that. It is the question, Under what conditions, or by what right, do those who advocate a partial agnosticism, a scepticism incomplete as regards extension, draw limitations as to the sphere of knowledge? This is a question, it seems to me, which agnostics have generally neglected altogether or answered only in an arbitrary and dogmatic manner. Yet all agnosticism seems to depend on it. What is its theory of knowledge? How has it got it? How has it attained a theory of knowledge which can warrant it to assign limits to knowledge, and say thus far but no farther? here man may search but there he ought not? matter is knowable but not mind? the ways of man may be traced but not those of God? At present I require only to consider the preliminary question of method, How may such a theory of knowledge be obtained as will warrant any limitation of the sphere of knowledge?

### I. ON ASSIGNING LIMITS TO KNOWLEDGE

The limits of knowledge cannot be laid down in an *a priori* manner. There is no useful theorising on knowledge possible apart from knowledge. It is presumptuous to warn intelligence off from investigation in any direction until we have informed ourselves that in that direction there is nothing for it to investigate. We have no right to affirm that any

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question which the mind can seriously ask, without manifest self-contradiction, may not be found answerable, until we have learned that all rational ways of answering it have been exhausted. We do not require to deny—we are not entitled to deny—that there are *a priori* limits or conditions of knowledge; but we are bound to deny the legitimacy of theorising on knowledge without knowledge, and without study of the various kinds of knowledge and of methods of investigation.

Further, we cannot hope to ascertain the limits of knowledge by a mere critique of the powers of knowledge. We cannot measure the range of our mental tether by simply taking an introspective view of it. No mere psychological analysis of the constitution of the intellect will enable us to trace the bounds of its competency. When, indeed, the laws of the intellect are violated truth cannot be attained, but to know that, and to know and conform to the laws of the intellect, is not to know *how much truth may be attained, how far intellect may advance in its quest after knowledge*. Everything at least that man does know he can know. Any estimate of man's power to know which leaves out of account what he actually knows must be an erroneous one. Hence the question, What do we know? should precede the question, What can we know? The positive grounds adduced in proof of knowledge ought never to be set aside or left unexamined because some general theory of knowledge has ignored them. No theory of knowledge is universally valid which does not apply to every instance or fact of knowledge; and consequent-



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ly it is vain to appeal to any theory of knowledge against positive evidence for knowledge.

Epistemology is the department of philosophy which undertakes to provide us with a theory of knowledge. It is concerned, therefore, not merely with some but with all knowledge, with knowledge as such in its entirety and universality, seeing that to attain a true and complete theory of anything an accurate and full knowledge of that thing is the indispensable condition. Epistemology as the theory of knowledge should be essentially *νόησις νοήσεως*, and ought to seek to become the complete theory of knowledge. But that it cannot become if it overlook or do injustice to any kind of knowledge. To deny to be science anything which professes to be so without an adequate examination of what it presents as proof of its claim is just the fault which epistemology is most bound to avoid, and which it can least commit without discrediting itself and showing its inconsistency. Epistemology is not entitled to lay down as conditions or limits of knowledge what are merely conditions or limits of some kind or kinds of knowledge, or to represent as an essential characteristic of knowledge any feature merely distinctive of a species of knowledge. It has no right to pronounce any form of knowledge not to be truly knowledge because the objects thereof are very unlike those of some other forms of knowledge. Its duty is studiously to trace, not arbitrarily to prescribe, the limits of knowledge. No special kind of knowledge is entitled to exemption from its criticism, but every kind of knowledge is entitled to receive from it full jus-

## PROPER FUNCTION OF EPISTEMOLOGY

tice. *Whatever claims to be knowledge should have its claims fairly examined, and should not be set aside as pseudo-science in misplaced confidence on any superficial generalisation or dogmatic assumption as to what is and what is not knowledge.* Hence epistemological theory cannot of itself warrant us to pronounce physiology, for example, a real science and psychology a pretended one, sense-perception a faculty of knowledge but apprehension of the Divine an allusion, phenomena within and noumena without the sphere of cognition, &c. Every such theory so applied is itself an example of pseudo-science, for the obvious reason that it refuses to investigate what presents itself as appropriate evidence, and limits knowledge by an altogether inappropriate sort of standard.

Obvious as the truth of the foregoing remarks should appear, it has often been overlooked and contravened; and by none more so than by those who have most loudly professed to be "scientific thinkers" and "critical philosophers." Thus Comtists have denied theology, metaphysics, and metageometry to be knowledge, for no better reason than that a crude historical generalisation, the so-called "law of the three states," required them to do so; and Kantians have made not less reckless applications of their unintelligible distinction between phenomena and noumena. Such a method of procedure is the very reverse of either "critical" or "scientific."

Prof. A. Sabbatier has said: "There is no serious philosophy to-day which does not start with a theory of knowledge."<sup>1</sup> The statement may, perhaps, be so

<sup>1</sup> The words which introduce his *Essai sur la connaissance religieuse*.

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understood as to be true and important. But it requires the following qualifying statement, which is neither less true nor less important. *There is no philosophy entitled to be considered serious which does not start in the formation of its theory of knowledge with an impartial study of the contents and grounds of whatever professes to be knowledge.* No serious philosophy will place such confidence in any general epistemological theory as to deny to be knowledge anything which seriously professes to be knowledge, and seriously adduces evidence in proof of the profession, until it has found the alleged evidence irrelevant or insufficient. A theory of knowledge must be judged of by knowledge, not knowledge by the theory. Precedence must be given not to the theory but to the knowledge. And the knowledge can only be substantiated by appropriate and sufficient evidence, relevant and adequate reasons.

Almost all partial agnosticism has arisen from a narrow view of knowledge, and has justified itself by exclusive reliance on knowledge of a particular kind. Thus there is a partial agnosticism in the form of scepticism as to philosophy. Those whose agnosticism is thus limited regard all philosophy as if it were "falsely so called." Hence, naturally, they do not profess to justify it in the name of philosophy, or by the aid of a rival philosophy. They do not pretend to found a system or school of philosophy of their own to prove to themselves and others that there is no philosophy, and that all profession of it is an empty boast; but are content to attack the object of their aversion in the name of theology, or of

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physical and mental science, or of what they call common-sense. They thus reject the teaching of philosophy as sophistry without examination of the evidence for its truth, because of its unlikeness to what they are accustomed to accept as knowledge. And obviously that is a most unreasonable procedure. It is not otherwise with religious agnosticism, scepticism as to spiritual truth. Doubt as to the rational validity of all religious convictions and theological doctrines has been very frequently based mainly or wholly on their unlikeness to the findings of positive, or even physical, science, and the difference of the methods by which they are respectively attained. Doubt of such a kind rests on a most insecure foundation. Man is spirit as well as flesh, and his perceptions are not limited to those of the eyes, ears, and other bodily senses, nor are his inferences only reliable within the sphere of empirical research. Physical science is not the only type or exclusive standard of science. To confine either knowledge or science within such limits as "sense-perception," "mental picturing," or "experimental verification," admits of no rational justification.

Physical science, it should be remembered, once suffered from the same narrow and exclusive method of judging which many of its votaries would now apply to other departments of knowledge. In Hindu philosophies, and in the speculations of thinkers like Plato and Plotinus, matter received scant justice. During the dominancy of theology in mediæval times physical science was neglected, and the physical world itself viewed as a degraded and disorderly

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thing, not a revelation of law and truth, but such "stuff as dreams are made of," a delusion and a snare. Now it has not only fully attained its rights but has often much more attributed to it than is its due. It is spoken of as if it were alone science, and as if there were hardly any other knowledge properly so called. That is to ascribe to it a most exaggerated value and authority, and should be treated as what it is, a mischievous modern form of superstition. The knowledge attained through mere sense is knowledge which we share in common with the lower animals, and which only does for us what it does for them, namely, enables us to provide for our bodily wants and to guard against bodily dangers. It does not take us beyond the mere surface even of material things, or show us exactly their properties and relations, unless guided and supplemented by reason, aided by all the other intellectual powers, furnished with artificial instruments, and following the methods of research which experience has proved to be appropriate. And even then it only helps us to make a better acquaintance with our material surroundings. It solves none of the mysteries of our own natures, and still less those of the nature, source, and ends of universal being. Physical science can supply material for a theory of knowledge, but it cannot yield a theory of knowledge, and has no right to lay down the limits of knowledge. It is not for it to deal with what is greatest in existence and concerns us most in life. A mere physicist's thoughts on "the riddles of existence" are seldom of much value. Although philosophy and theology are bound

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not to contradict physical science they are equally bound not to be subject to it. A philosophy or theology judged from the standpoint of physical science must be a philosophy or theology misjudged.

It is obviously a part of the proper work of philosophy to provide a theory of knowledge. For whatever else philosophy may be occupied with it is occupied with knowledge as no other kind of thought or any special science is. Ordinary thought is not reflection on knowledge or criticism of knowledge. Every special science is a particular kind of knowledge and has a limited province of knowledge. Philosophy alone has all knowledge for its province, and is also, at least in idea, the highest kind of thought. But philosophy cannot evolve a theory of knowledge out of pure thought, and, of course, not out of the mere ignorance which is what is often meant by pure thought. It cannot, any more than ordinary or scientific thinking, build without bricks, and without even the constituents of which bricks are made, as a Spinoza, Fichte, and Schelling so often sought to compel it to do. It has to educe its epistemology, reflectively and critically, from study of the operations of the laws of thought and of the evidence for all kinds of knowledge; or, in other words, from all the truth attained by humanity through all the means of discovery at its disposal.

Philosophy in treating of the theory of knowledge has to presuppose ordinary knowledge and the special positive sciences. The latter do not presuppose philosophy and have not originated in any philosophical theory of knowledge. They are the products of a



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reason which has been directly occupied with definite kinds of given questions and objects. The scientist is content to confine his researches within a definitely limited department of nature, and to follow the methods which he finds to be most successful therein. He does not require to assume a general theory of knowledge before proceeding with his own special work. Philosophy, it must be added, has not as yet done nearly as much as it ought to provide scientists with a trustworthy and helpful doctrine of science. It can only do so by taking adequate account of the results and methods of the sciences, so as to be able to make clearly and explicitly conscious to scientists what they had already possessed, but only in a more or less vaguely implicit and unconscious condition. In order to determine what can be known it must, in all ways appropriate to philosophy, make itself acquainted with what is known, how it has become known, and what is its place and worth in the world as known. The philosopher who, without a knowledge of mathematics, undertakes to assign its limits and prescribe its methods, shows arrogant ignorance. He must conform his epistemology to mathematics, not mathematics to an epistemology which has taken no serious account of it. The same holds good as to the relation of all other sciences to philosophy. And this is now generally admitted as regards most of the sciences. The philosopher as an epistemologist does not venture to deny them to be sciences, although he may often fail to show as satisfactorily as he ought that they are so, and why they are so. The epistemology of philosophers is very

frequently exceedingly vague and worthless, for the obvious reason that philosophers often know exceedingly little, and that little not firmly or clearly. Philosophy to provide a true theory of knowledge must itself have acquired much knowledge of every kind,—attained thorough insight into the distinctive characteristics of all the sciences, into the *rationale* of their processes, their actual internal logic, and their organic connections. It must be worthy to be called the *scientia scientiarum*.

Philosophers now seldom assume too sceptical an attitude towards either the demonstrative or the positive sciences. As regards the former, mathematicians can easily protect themselves, and are fully aware that only competent mathematicians can philosophise with advantage on the nature of mathematical knowledge, or on the interrelations, distinctive functions, and special relations of the various mathematical sciences. Hence their territories are not invaded and overrun by vague and pretentious theorists. As regards the physical sciences, the great majority of persons who take any interest in philosophy are too credulous. They are too apt to accept as science all that physicists say, as certain what they merely conjecture, and as “scientific” or “non-scientific” whatever they so designate. That is, of course, a very unphilosophical attitude. There is no genuine philosophy where there is no free philosophical criticism and a sufficiency of knowledge to make such criticism possible. To the psychological sciences less favour is shown. Philosophers with a materialistic or empirical creed naturally “crib, cabin, and con-

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fine" psychology so as to make it conform in all directions to their creed. The dogmatism in their metaphysical principles reveals itself as scepticism in their psychological assumptions.

It is the theological sciences, however, which are treated most sceptically and with least modesty and equity. Many who presume to speak with authority in the name of philosophy on the limits of knowledge affirm as a truth which requires no proof, or as one which philosophy has itself demonstrated, that there is no religious truth, no theological science. They propound theories of knowledge which represent religion as outside of the sphere of knowledge, and do so with very inadequate examination of its contents and evidences. They pronounce theological sciences or disciplines, which they have scarcely, if at all, examined, not to be scientific studies. The injustice of the procedure is obvious, and yet it is very common. Well might Prof. Veitch say of the kind of epistemology to which I refer, the kind which is so frequently applied to the prejudice of religion: "I distinctly object to what is called the Theory of Knowledge, if this be not preceded by a thorough examination and analysis of what we do as a matter of fact know, in and by consciousness in all its forms, —from Sense-Perception, through Memory, Imagination, Thinking—including concepts, judgments, reasonings—up even to that side of our consciousness which is conversant with what we call the Infinite, the Absolute, the Unconditioned, the Divine. If, for example, we start simply with the knowledge we get in Sense-Perception, and draw out its con-

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ditions and laws, and then carry them all through our knowledge as its laws, we shall make the blunder of limiting knowledge to a single, and perhaps comparatively insignificant, portion of its sphere. The laws of our knowing the object in time and space are not necessarily the laws of our knowing all objects.”<sup>1</sup>

Those who profess to have religious knowledge are not less bound than those who profess to have any other kind of knowledge to prove the truth of what they profess. Those who regard theology as religious science have no right to claim for their theology immunity from any truly rational criticism or independence of any truly rational philosophy; no such right as those who are content to accept religion as guaranteed by mere feeling, faith, or authority have demanded for it. Theology is not entitled as knowledge or science to be judged with exceptional favour or laxity because religious, but only to be treated with the same fairness and reasonableness as other forms of inquiry and reflection. Common justice is all to which it has a right; but to that it is entitled, and that is what it frequently fails to receive. Many venture, without examining its own direct and intrinsic evidences, to declare it neither knowledge nor science on the ground that it is inconsistent with some general theory or other of knowledge. They thus venture to deal with it otherwise than they dare to deal with any other department of knowledge. That is an altogether unfair and illogical procedure. It is the main reason why theologians require to take more notice of theories of knowledge than physicists,

<sup>1</sup> *Knowing and Being*, p. 3.

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say, need to do. Physicists, as a rule, do not trouble themselves about theories of knowledge. They take it for granted, and can afford to do so, that no one will dare, in the name of an epistemology, to set at nought and refuse to look at the evidence which they adduce for their findings as to physical things. Theologians cannot act so because they are not equally sure of fair treatment. They have to consider that there are professed philosophers with an anti-theological bias who seek to arrest their inquiries and reject their findings with epistemological hypotheses. In those circumstances theologians little versed in philosophy may rightfully insist on pursuing their own labours and holding to their own conclusions so long as they are not met on their own ground and their own reasons are not weighed; and those of them who are competently conversant with it may further venture to criticise any epistemology to which their adversaries appeal.

There are some truths regarding the limitation of knowledge which must not here be left wholly undicated.

1. No object of belief or thought, not evidently self-contradictory, should be assumed to be unknowable. It may just as rationally be assumed to be knowable. It is no less incumbent to give reasons for holding any conceivable object or proposition unknowable than for holding it knowable. There is as much demand for evidence for the denial as for the assertion of cognoscibility. A man who says that God is unknowable is under as much obligation to justify the statement as the man is who says God

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may be known. The only difference between them is that the man who says God is unknowable has much the more difficult proposition to prove. A negative proposition, unless it involve a manifest self-contradiction, is always more difficult to prove than an affirmative one. There are persons, however, and agnostics are very frequently of the number, who seem to think that only knowableness requires to be proved, and that unknowableness may be assumed without evidence.

2. All that we have reason to believe real we have also reason to believe knowable. Much that is real may be unknowable to us; yet so far from being unknowable to us because it is real, in so far as we have any good reason to believe it real we have also reason to believe it knowable. It is the unreal which is necessarily unknowable, for it is no object of thought at all. One cannot prove anything about nothing; one cannot prove to exist what does not exist. The unreal is the negative at once of the real and the knowable. Existence and knowableness—reality, truth, and proveability—are coincident and inseparable. In the Absolute Reality, with which philosophy and theology are alike concerned although in different ways, there can be no darkness, no unintelligibility, at all. Itself must fully know itself. To say that the world, the soul, or God *is, yet cannot be known*, is a statement both presumptuous and nonsensical. So far as anything really is it is knowable through the manifestation of what it really is.

3. It seems erroneous to suppose that we can draw



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definite objective lines of demarcation between the knowable and the unknowable. We may draw lines between the known and the unknown, and it is highly desirable to draw such lines when we can, and as distinctly as possible. It is the characteristic of an accurate and careful thinker to distinguish as precisely as he can between what he does and does not know; and to do so is always a forward step in a man's pursuit of knowledge. But it is at once a mark of mental confusion and a perverse exercise of ingenuity to attempt to trace the external or objective boundaries of rational research,—to draw lines in the outward universe beyond which all must be a *terra incognita* and within which all is explicable. Dr. Bithell—an agnostic writer to whom I have already had occasion to refer—declares his inability to understand this objection to his agnosticism, and ventures to affirm that “the line of demarcation between the knowable and the unknowable is at least as sharp and clear as the *mathematical* line which separates two plane surfaces.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed! There is no difficulty in drawing—in mentally realising—a clear and sharp line of demarcation *between the known and the known*, especially when both knowns are of the same nature. But is it as easy to draw such a line *between the known and the unknown*? Certainly not. For the ordinary human intellect there is no clear and sharp line of distinction like a mathematical one between those two. Their boundaries are continually changing and commonly very indistinct. But what Dr. Bithell, with “a light heart,” ventures

<sup>1</sup> *Agnostic Problems*, p. 3.

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to undertake is a far more difficult task than to fix the boundaries between the known and unknown; it is to draw a line as clear and sharp as if it were a mathematical one *between two unknowns, and one of which is not only unknown but unknowable*. That I venture to think must be a problem which no finite being can solve. Dr. Bithell has certainly not solved it by telling us that "the line of demarcation between the Knowable and the Unknowable may be defined as that which separates those phenomena that come within the range of consciousness from those facts or truths which lie beyond the reach of consciousness."<sup>1</sup> That is only equivalent to saying that *we know what we know and cannot know what we cannot know*,—a truism which defines and distinguishes nothing, and is of no value whatever. Dr. Bithell represents Kant and Ferrier as having taught to the same effect as himself, but the two quotations (p. 5) adduced in proof are to quite a different effect. There is no warrant in the history of philosophy for his statement that "philosophers, generally, are pretty well agreed in making consciousness the line of demarcation between the Knowable and the Unknowable." I am not aware of any philosopher of eminence having come to such a pass as that. Philosophers, generally, are pretty well agreed, I think, that to draw a line of demarcation between the Knowable and the Unknowable is impossible; that there is absurdity—self-contradiction—in the very attempt; that to draw such a line we must have already done what we affirm to be impossible—known the unknowable; that we cannot

<sup>1</sup> *Agnostic Problems*, p. 4.

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draw a boundary unless we see over it, or, as Hegel says,—“ No one is aware that anything is a limit or defect until at the same time he is above and beyond it.”

4. The only ascertainable limitations of the mind manifesting itself as reason—*i.e.*, in the appropriation of knowledge and truth—are those which are inherent in its own constitution. They are subjective not objective limitations. They are inherent in and constitutive of intelligence. Reason—the mind as cognitive or rational—has its limits in its own laws. To discover, state, and expound those laws is the business of Epistemology or Theory of Knowledge, which is intimately connected with Psychology, Formal Logic, and Methodology. The laws of reason—laws of intuition, evidence, and inference—are manifestly not external boundaries, but they are the only discoverable expressions of the Divine “ Thus far.” So long as reason conforms to its own laws it cannot go too far. When it does not conform to them it ceases to be reason and becomes unreason. Reason is entitled to examine any and every thing which comes under its notice, and cannot push examination too far so long as it remains reason. Only when it violates some law or laws of its own has it gone too far,—has it erred and strayed,—and then simply because it has ceased to be rational. Does the agnostic say that that may be true of reason and its sphere the Knowable, but that beyond them there are faith and its sphere the Unknowable, and that “ he is prepared to work on both sides of the line of demarcation? On the side of the Know-

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able he founds and cultivates his Science; on the side of the Unknowable he finds an illimitable arena for the exercise of Belief and Faith.”<sup>1</sup> Reason and Belief or Faith, however, cannot be so separated. Where there is no reason or knowledge there should be no belief or faith. In the Unknowable there is no arena for the exercise of a reasonable belief or an honest faith. All that the mind can do on the side of the Unknowable is to play at make-belief, to feign faith, to worship nothingness. Such exercise must be both intellectually and morally a very dangerous sort of exertion. Madness that way lies.

5. Knowledge is limited by evidence. We lack knowledge of what we have not sufficient evidence for. Nothing, however, sufficiently proved by evidence of any kind is to be rejected because it cannot be proved by evidence of another kind. Demonstration is the proof appropriate in mathematics, but it is a kind of proof which one has no right to demand in psychology, ethics, or history, or even in the physical sciences. Proof, and thoroughly satisfactory proof too, has many forms. Hence the words *prove* and *proof* have necessarily many variations of signification. Agnostics often make an abusive application of that fact. Their favourite quotation is drawn from Tennyson's *Ancient Sage*:—

“Thou canst not prove the Nameless, O my son,  
Nor canst thou prove the world thou movest in,  
Thou canst not prove that thou art body alone,  
Nor canst thou prove that thou art spirit alone,  
Nor canst thou prove that thou art both in one :  
Thou canst not prove thou art immortal, no

<sup>1</sup> Bithell, *Agnostic Problems*, p. 17.

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Nor yet that thou art mortal—nay, my son,  
Thou canst not prove that I, who speak with thee,  
Am not thyself in converse with thyself,  
For nothing worthy proving can be proven,  
Nor yet disproven : wherefore thou be wise,  
Cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt,  
And cling to Faith beyond the forms of Faith ! ”

These lines are very beautiful, and perhaps precise enough for the poet's purpose, but they have no claim to be regarded as a correct expression of a true philosophical creed. The “ Nameless ” is the Being who has been named more or less aptly in all the languages of the earth, and who has been almost universally recognised by mankind as the most self-revealing of Beings. In the ordinary signification of the word “ prove,” *all sane men accept as adequately proved* the existence of the world, of themselves, of their bodies and spirits, and that in each of them body and spirit are united ; and if many of them are in doubt as to whether they are mortal or immortal it is *because of a conflict of reasons which makes them dubious as to whether there is proof or on which side it is*. The evidence for the distinction between “ I ” and “ Thou ” excludes all rational doubt. It is “ proof ” as strong as the self-evidence of a mathematical axiom. “ Nothing worthy proving ” *has been left without the power of proving itself*. “ Cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt ” is very questionable advice—an encouragement to selfishness and indulgence—unless it mean, Cleave to the side on which the light of reason, the sun of truth, shines clearest. I do not in the least blame the poet for his use of the word *prove* ; *demonstrate* would have taken all the

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music out of his lines. What I object to is that agnostics should expect us to accept his words as literally, or even substantially, true.

6. The existence of obscurity, mystery, and difficulties in connection with the objects of knowledge does not disprove knowledge of them. Propositions may be perfectly true, and conclusively proved to be true, although they involve incomprehensible conceptions, and are associated with unanswerable difficulties. The ultimate truths even of mathematics have all a side which is lost in difficulty and darkness. The conclusions of the infinitesimal calculus when properly worked out have to be accepted in spite of all the perplexities which may be suggested by thinking of infinites and infinitesimals of different orders. It shows a lack of clearness of thought to reject truths because of merely connected difficulties. Whatever reason assures us to be real and certain is to be accepted, however much there may be associated with it which is dubious and perplexing. The mysteriousness inseparable from the immensity, infinity, eternity of God, and Space, and Time does not make their existence in the least degree doubtful. As our knowledge that the grass grows is not in the least subverted by our ignorance of *how* it grows, so our knowledge of *the existence* of an Infinite and Absolute Being is quite compatible with our inability to form clear and adequate conceptions of Infinity, Absoluteness, and Being.

### II. THE ULTIMATE OBJECTS OF KNOWLEDGE

The most generally adopted distribution of the ultimate objects of knowledge is the threefold one—



Self, the World, and God. Those three objects Bishop Westcott, for instance, designates "the three final existences which sum up for us all being," and treats of them as such in a very instructive and suggestive way in his *Gospel of Life* (ch. i., pp. 2-42). So Professor Fraser in his *Philosophy of Theism* (Lect. II.) describes them as "the three primary data differently conceived by different minds"—"the ultimate threefold articulation of the universe of existence"—and admirably emphasises the importance of the right correlation of them in human thought and life. That mode of distribution, besides being the most familiar one, is also the most convenient as regards all that I have at present in view, a consideration of agnosticism as to Self and the World in so far, and only in so far, as it bears on agnosticism as to God. Therefore I avail myself of it.

That it is a faultless distribution of the ultimate objects of knowledge, or one which can be safely accepted as the principle of a classification of the sciences or of the organisation of a philosophy, I am far from affirming. On the contrary, I admit it to have various defects. Two of them it seems necessary to indicate.

The first is that the terms "Self," "World," and "God" are not unambiguous terms. "Self" and "world" are apt to seem quite clear and definite. They are really very much the reverse. "Self"! What "self"? Is it merely the individual self, the self of self-consciousness, the subject of a mind as cognisant of itself in feeling, desiring, believing,

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knowing, willing, &c. If so, every "self" except the individual's own must be included not in "self" but in the "world," or at least in a distinct category of selves—say "other selves." The difference between the "self" of self-consciousness and the "selves" which are to that "self" merely objects of knowledge is in some respects even greater than that between the subjective self and physical objects. If by "self" be meant both the subjective self and objective selves, humanity or the human mind or human nature would seem to be what is denoted by it. But is even that all that should be meant? Can we stop even there? Should not all that feels, every sentient creature, be regarded as a "self"? If so, by "self" must be understood not the individual self, but the whole finite animate or conscious world, or even all spiritual being and life, the Divine included. But in that case by the "world" would have to be meant the merely material, the exclusively physical, world. No one, however, so restricts the signification of the term in ordinary speech. The external world is not merely composed of dead and physical things but to a large extent of living and conscious things. "Nature" and "universe" we often vaguely call it. And under those names monistic physicists are in the habit of identifying God with it or including God in it, while thorough and consistent pantheists represent it not as an object of knowledge but as essentially an illusion, a deceptive appearance of reality.

The term "God" as used in agnostic controversy is—notwithstanding all the different conceptions

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which men have formed of God, and notwithstanding also that agnostics deny God to be an object of knowledge, or affirm that He is only an object of belief—less ambiguous than either “self” or “world.” And the reason is obvious. Non-agnostics have to state clearly what they mean by the term “God,” and agnostics are bound to show that in the sense affirmed there is no known or even knowable God. When, therefore, the non-agnostic declares that he has, and that others may have, good and sufficient reasons for holding that there is a self-existent, infinite, eternal, morally perfect spirit or mind, the source, sustainer, and controller of all finite minds and existences, the agnostic may, or rather must, deny his statement, but he cannot deny that he knows what the term “God” as employed by his opponent means, and what both the affirmation and the denial of God in that sense mean. In controversy between an agnostic and a non-agnostic there need be no ambiguity as to what is meant by “God,” and there seldom is any. One cannot say the same of the terms “self” and “world.” It is much easier, however, to indicate than to remove the defects of the ordinary threefold distribution of objects of knowledge; much easier to criticise it than to replace it by a better. There is happily no reason why I should undertake the latter task.

None of the ambiguities in the terms of the aforesaid distribution of ultimate objects of knowledge can affect anything which I have to say in the present chapter regarding agnosticism as to either self-knowledge or world-knowledge. But this question

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does so to some extent,—Are we entitled in any distribution of such objects of knowledge to ignore Space and Time, which, while identical neither with “self” nor the “world,” mind nor matter, are yet not mere imaginations or nonentities, but necessities of thought, conditions of existence, and the very foundations of mathematical science, on which so much other science is dependent? True, the mathematical sciences are not dependent only on the quantitative relations with which they are occupied. They depend also on the formal laws of thought which it is the business of Logic to expound. Subjective laws, however, would not lead to objective truths had they not real objects to deal with. It has never been shown to be even conceivable that without apprehensions of space and time we could have any valid or consistent conception whatever of objectivity or externality. On those apprehensions the mathematical sciences rest, and of all sciences they are the most certain and exact. They can dispense with observation and are independent of experimentation. They need no external verification. They prove by their very existence that there is a knowledge perfect of its kind which has not its exclusive or even its main source in sense, and the limits of which are not those of sense. They are in themselves an irrefragable refutation of the hypotheses as to the nature and limits of knowledge propounded by empiricists and positivists. Neither their principles nor their conclusions are generalisations of the data of sense. And yet they are—regarded merely as knowledge—knowledge at its best. Plato and New-

ton have spoken of God as "thinking mathematically." Novalis has enthusiastically declared—"Pure Mathematics is religion, the life of the gods is mathematics, the mathematicians are the only happy men." John Bright has been credited (I forget by whom) with having said—"Teach a boy arithmetic thoroughly and you will make a man of him." If he said so he must have felt that there was something more in arithmetic than most people imagine, something ethical and divine, in virtue of which, if "thoroughly taught," it would not merely exercise "the arithmetical understanding" and make quick and accurate calculations, but also so influence the whole character and life as to make "men."

Space and Time are not mere subjective conceptions. They are not arbitrary creations of thought. It is not in any man's power to accept or reject them at will, or to apprehend them otherwise than as all men apprehend them. They are objects of intuition and forms of thought, but not merely or exclusively so; on the contrary, they are intimately and inseparably connected with all the facts of experience and all the objects of nature. Idealism and empiricism are alike incompetent adequately to account for or even accurately to describe them. Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* has attempted to do so from the standpoint of the former, and Dr. Shadworth Hodgson in his *Metaphysic of Experience* from the standpoint of the latter. Both have failed. Both have had to assume as regards alike Space and Time what they professed to prove. They have certainly not failed from lack of either ingenuity or

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industry, of either ability or zeal. To all appearance they have failed because they attempted the impossible, and there is little hope of any one else succeeding who confines himself to the course or method of either.

Reason cannot refuse to recognise that Space and Time are infinite and eternal. Only so can it think of them. To affirm them to be finite as regards either extension or duration would be for reason a suicidal act. The familiar words *everywhere* and *always* imply all that is explicitly expressed by *infinite* and *eternal*. It is distinctive of man as a rational being to have an implicit knowledge of infinity and eternity. As soon as he is capable of reflection he finds himself cognisant of those two transcendental realities. He can confidently affirm space to be infinite in every direction, as it is a self-contradiction, manifestly irrational, to regard it as finite in any direction. The finite is the limited. But by what is space limited? It must be either by a vacuum or a plenum, and yet it is absurd to regard it as limited by either. There is space where there is neither the one nor the other. Were there no matter in existence,—were not merely the gross matter which we apprehend through all our senses but also the subtle and mysterious ether which is the subject of so much speculation and the object of so little positive knowledge annihilated,—there would not be an inch of space either more or less in the universe. Time is infinite in two directions. It has no limit either on the side of the past or of the future. To say of anything that it happened



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or will happen at no time is equivalent to saying that it has never happened or will never happen. Estimates of time may vary indefinitely. Short-lived creatures may, perhaps, in some species be so organised as to feel life as long as those that are really long-lived. A drowning man may in a few minutes feel as if he were passing through the whole course of his past life. A dreaming man may in as short a time imagine himself passing through hours of exertion, danger, or sorrow. A thousand years may be as a day and a day as a thousand years according to the differences in the rapidity, vivacity, intensity, &c., of subjective states experienced. Yet Time itself does not vary—does not flow faster or slower, but continuously and equably through innumerable imperceptible instants. There is not a minute more in an hour felt to be long than in one felt to be brief.

That Space and Time are we know and cannot fail to know. Mathematics shows that a vast amount may be known with certainty about them and in dependence on them. Yet how mysterious they are! How difficult, and indeed even impossible, it is to find or invent fitting words to express what they are! To say that space is extension and time duration is just to say that space is space and time time, or that space and time are what they are, which is no doubt true, but no doubt also does not add in the least to our information as to their nature. Are they “things”? Certainly not, if all things are either material or spiritual. They are neither material nor spiritual, although there is nothing finite, whether

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material or spiritual, conceivable by us otherwise than as within them. Are they properties or qualities? Perhaps they are. But before we are entitled positively to affirm that they are, we should require to know what qualities or properties are, and of what substance or substances, being or beings, space and time are the qualities or properties. As they are infinite and eternal they cannot be confined or specially belong to any finite being or substance. The infinite and eternal can be coexistent and coextensive with itself alone. To characterise time and space as merely forms of thought has the serious defect of not describing them as they are actually thought of, namely, as necessary objects of thought and necessary conditions of objective existence.

Our apprehensions of space and time are inseparable from thoughts and convictions of immensity and eternity, and consequently bring with them the same thoughts and convictions as our apprehensions of God. They are in the same way mysterious, and in the same way so far from self-contradictory that they cannot fail to command assent. While matter is unthinkable as either infinite or eternal,—while it can only be conceived of as within time and space, as having begun at a given time and reached a definite date, and as being of some particular magnitude and form,—space and time are like God in that they are only truly thinkable as infinite and eternal. Hence our thoughts of them bring with them some of the same difficulties as our thoughts of God. They bring with them the same great mysteries of self-existence, eternity, and infinity.

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Yet they are not therefore incompatible with knowledge and rational belief. On the contrary, they are vehicles of a real knowledge of time as eternal, of space as infinite, and of both as necessarily existent; such a knowledge as should at least suffice to prevent us from venturing to deny that God can be known as eternal, infinite, and necessarily existent. No otherwise can God be consistently thought of than as possessed of those attributes. To think of God as having begun to be in time or as confined to a limited space is to think of Him as a god who must have been created by another God; in other words, must be to regard Him as a false god, as not truly God. No thoughtful atheist even can think of any being not eternal and infinite as truly God. Such an atheist, if the most thorough-going materialist, must feel bound to invest matter itself with the attributes of infinity and eternity. He cannot rationally maintain that it has created itself or assigned conditions or limits to itself. Nor can he reasonably maintain that it has been created either by eternal time or infinite space, for neither the one nor the other causes or creates anything. They are conditions of existence but not efficient agents, not endowed with any kind of power. They in no way account for the existence, organisation, peculiarities, or activities of anything. Infinite space and eternal time can originate and explain nothing unless conjoined with Absolute Being,—self-existent, self-active, and spiritual Being,—the Being on which all finite and dependent beings, all animate creatures, all selves, all societies, live, move and have their

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being. The infinity of space and eternity of time, instead of entitling us to dispense with faith in an infinite and eternal God, seem rather to demand such faith. The self-consistency of thought requires it. Reason insists that the empty infinities of space and time be filled with the powers and perfections of reason in order to be the Absolute Infinity which can alone satisfy rational minds and explain a rationally organised universe. And the most resolute materialists have had practically to acknowledge the justice of the claim. They have been compelled to exercise their imaginations at the cost of their reason in the deification of matter. Holbach, for example, in his *Système de la Nature* ascribed to matter much which he denied to God, but which cannot be sanely conceived to belong to matter, and which contradicts the teachings of genuine science. Haeckel, whose so-called *Monism* is the present-day counterpart of Holbach's *Naturalism*, attributes infinity and eternity to a world-substance, that in the form or "Ether" pervades, fills, and animates all space and time, and is, in his opinion, the only satisfactory basis of either religion or morality. Nature or the World he divides into "Ether" (= spirit), mobile or active substance, with vibration as its property, electricity, magnetism, light, and heat as its functions, and a dynamical, continuous, elastic, and probably non-atomic structure; and "Mass" (= body) inert or passive substance, with inertia as its property, gravity and chemical affinity as its functions, and a discontinuous, inelastic, and probably atomic structure. Ether, we are told, is, theosophically

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speaking, God the Creator, and Mass or Body the created world (*Monism*, p. 106). Such a doctrine is surely no improvement on the materialistic systems of earlier times, very unlikely indeed to solve any *Welträthsel*, and worthless as a basis for either religion or morality. The word God has a definite meaning, and no man has any more right to identify it with the Ether than with a stock or a stone.

That eternity and infinity are not in themselves distinctively religious ideas I fully grant. To worship pure space or mere time is impossible. No human being has ever done anything so foolish. I must, however, entirely dissent from the opinion of Dr. Paul Carus<sup>1</sup> that religion would not suffer if the ideas of eternity and infinity were abstracted or dissociated from our thoughts of God. It seems to me that it would suffer dreadfully; that the abstraction referred to would leave little room for rational faith in God or enlightened piety towards God. To deny the infinity and eternity of God appears equivalent to affirming that there are places where He is not or even cannot be, and to imply that He is such a god as Elijah described Baal to be, one to whom it might be necessary to cry very loud as he might be wholly engrossed with his own thoughts, or on a journey, or peradventure asleep and must be awaked. How has so earnest and able a thinker as Dr. Carus taken up such a position? Apparently in consequence of meaning by the term "God" "cosmical law," and by the term "religion" "morality" or "ethical conduct." Can any one, however, have a right so to

<sup>1</sup> *Homilies of Science*, pp. 108-112.

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employ those terms in controversy with others who are using them in their ordinary sense? Surely not. Such an employment of them manifestly tends to efface the distinction between theism and atheism, and to make rational discussion between the theist and atheist, the religious and non-religious man, impossible.

Our cognitions even of Time and Space imply some knowledge of the Absolute and Infinite. Much more must such knowledge be involved in our apprehensions of God, the true Absolute, the positive Infinite, the self-existent and all-perfect Being. It does not follow, however, that we have any absolute or infinite knowledge. All human knowledge is relative and finite. Even the mathematician has only a relative knowledge of the absolutes on which all his science rests.

One of them is "time." The mathematician does not know *what* time is, but must assume *that it is*, and must reason and calculate on that assumption. He thinks of it as an absolute—as that which always was, which necessarily is, which must for ever be, and yet which is constantly disappearing and reappearing, ceasing to be and coming to be, at every instant,—a continuum which is ever the same and yet never the same, and which flows ever onwards at an unvarying rate. He cannot do otherwise than so think of it, although when so thought of it is profoundly mysterious and accompanied by apparent self-contradictions which no one seems to have satisfactorily explained away. He would seriously err were he to conceive of it as what may once not have been or as



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what may not always be, as capable of going not only forwards but backwards, as flowing at one time fast and at another slow or occasionally ceasing to move at all. Yet while he would seriously err were he to reject the idea of "mathematical, true, and absolute time," he may well be profoundly thankful that in the prosecution of his science or in the application of it what he has to deal with is "relative, apparent, and common time."

Not otherwise is it as regards "space." Space is necessarily thought of as absolute and infinite, as what cannot not be or be otherwise than as it is thought to be—*i.e.*, as immovable and irremovable, immutable and indivisible, timeless and changeless. Yet no human being has an absolute apprehension of space. The mathematician and the metaphysician alike must be content with a relative, vague, and imperfect apprehension of it. The more they know of it the more conscious will they be how relative and imperfect their conceptions of it are. Until modern times men thought that they knew with entire certainty where the centre of the world was—that it was at Jerusalem—and that there could not possibly be men on the side of it opposite to their own. Will any one now venture to affirm that *there is an absolute centre or absolute up or down in space?* Would doing so not be to follow the bad example of the Christian fathers and medieval schoolmen who pronounced it senseless and profane to believe that there could be human beings on the side of the earth opposite to their own? It was for many ages firmly held that the sun and planets turned round the earth. Copernicus and Gal-

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ileo proved that the geocentric theory should give place to a heliocentric one, and, notwithstanding the long and bitter opposition alike of Catholic and of Protestant divines, the latter theory is now universally accepted. Its superiority over the geocentric theory as regards tracing the movements of the universe is obvious and immense. It is vastly more convenient to take the sun as the standpoint of observation than the earth. But the geocentric theory was not wholly erroneous; on the contrary, the predecessors of Galileo observed, from their point of view, as correctly as he did from his. Nor is the heliocentric theory ideally perfect. The sun no more affords an absolute position than the earth does. In some of the far-off worlds of God's great universe there may quite conceivably be astronomers who have enormous advantages in the prosecution of their studies over their terrestrial brethren. Although then a vague apprehension of absolute space seems to underlie and to be implied in all our definite and relative conceptions of space, it would seem as if we can only deal in a practical way with relative space. "Any one," Clerk Maxwell wisely and wittily said, "who will try to imagine the state of a mind conscious of knowing the absolute position of a point will ever after be content with our relative knowledge."<sup>1</sup>

### III. AGNOSTICISM AND THE SELF

Of all kinds of doubt or disbelief the most difficult for the sceptic to justify is doubt or disbelief of the testimony of self-consciousness. Indeed it is only

<sup>1</sup> *Matter and Motion*, p. 20.

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possible to give expression to such doubt or disbelief in confused and self-contradictory terms. To entertain either the one or the other intelligently and sincerely is impossible so long as by self-consciousness is meant self-consciousness strictly so-called,—self-consciousness in its own proper and special sphere.

That sphere is, however, narrower than the ordinary man, than the non-psychologist, is apt to suppose. Self-consciousness is often imagined to testify to far more than it does, and is very apt to be appealed to in an unwarranted way. Difficult and delicate cross-questioning may be required to elicit precisely what its testimony is, and much caution and judgment to apply that testimony aright. Careful analysis and induction are needed in order to determine what properly belongs to self-consciousness, what is exactly and exclusively its own, and what is merely associated with it or implied in it. Self-consciousness seems to testify to the validity of a great number of perceptions and judgments which are not immediate apprehensions of its own but beliefs and inferences as to the origin and nature, truth or falsity, normality or abnormality, of which self-consciousness is no adequate judge. For example, it seems to testify that we see directly, immediately, and exclusively through the organs of vision, one object to be more distant from us than another; the relative sizes and various other features of the constituents of a landscape, &c.: yet it is not so, the perception of distance being an acquired perception, and the eye, although seeming, in the circumstances supposed, to do all the needed work, in reality merely giving visual marks which we are

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able to interpret through experiences acquired from touch, muscular exertion, &c. We seem to be conscious that the moon is a bright disk, that we are at rest in space, and that the earth occupies a fixed position. But Astronomy dispels those illusions of consciousness; proves that moon and stars are not what they seem,—that where we think rest is there is motion, and where motion rest; and, in a word, shows that the appearances to sense, being as dependent on the constitution of the organs of the subject as of the properties of the object, do not correspond with the realities beyond them. As to mental processes of a subtler kind,—those of an entirely psychological nature,—the illusions and involuntary deceptions of consciousness, or rather what appear to be such, are not less numerous, nor can it be less the work of science not to confirm but to correct them.

Self-consciousness is consciousness only of our own mental states, and only of them as being ours. When we know, feel, desire, or will in any form, the knowing, feeling, desiring, willing, is known, felt, consciously realised by us as belonging to us, as states of our own selves. Along with whatever we know, or otherwise consciously experience, self or the ego is known or consciously experienced. The knowledge thus afforded us, and no other, is the knowledge which is given in self-consciousness. The fact that such knowledge is distinctly limited ought to be carefully noted. The agnostic argumentation as to self-knowledge generally derives any plausibility it has to overlooking it, and consequently charging self-consciousness with failing to be or to attain what it cannot

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intelligently be claimed to be or held to aim at. Self-consciousness is not a substitute for any other form of knowledge; it cannot perform the work of our senses, our memories, or any of our processes of logical inference or scientific method. It can only certify to present belief; not to past belief, or to the truth of belief as to external objects whether present or past. It can only certify as to what is immediately given in and to itself; not as to how or by what processes that has been given. It can only certify to the particular immediately and directly felt; not to what is general and gained by inference, induction, or abstraction.

We are not to infer, however, that because the knowledge given by self-consciousness is limited, as has just been indicated, it is therefore either small in amount or of slight importance. It is, on the contrary, very extensive and supremely valuable, owing to being inseparable from knowledge in every form and the condition of all functions of mental life. When I think *I know that I think*. When I experience an emotion *I know that I experience it*. When I take a resolution *I know that I take it*. When I put forth voluntary energy *I know that I am doing so*. Self-consciousness cleaves to the self in all phases of its activity, experience, and endurance. It is a direct and immediate knowledge of all the mental states of the self so far as they are directly and immediately known. Without it we could have *no knowledge even of our own minds*, as all mediate and indirect knowledge presupposes and is rendered possible by immediate and direct knowledge. Along with whatever we know, or even can seem to know, self must be known,

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and the knowledge of self in the form of self-consciousness is the root of all attainable knowledge of self beyond the sphere of immediate self-consciousness. But it is vastly more than that, being implied in all our knowledge of the material world and entering still more deeply into our knowledge of the spiritual world. It is indispensable to our attainment of any knowledge of other selves. Self-consciousness is the key which enables us to enter into the consciousness of the race, to interpret the experiences of all sorts and conditions of men, and to realise that nothing human is foreign to us. It gives to the individual mind access to the universal mind of which history is the record; and thus, as Emerson has reminded us, makes man not only

“owner of the sphere,  
Of the seven stars and the solar year,”

but also

“Of Cæsar’s hand, and Plato’s brain,  
Of Lord Christ’s heart, and Shakespeare’s strain.”

Nor is the community of consciousness which is rooted in self-consciousness confined to humanity. It takes in animal consciousness and makes men capable of understanding what the expressions of that consciousness signify. Only through it is access possible into the wondrous world of life and activity constituted by the innumerable beings which, although lower than man, are in many instructive ways related to him. The whole science of comparative psychology is dependent on it, and comparative psychology has to do not only with the physical states of



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all varieties of mankind but of all species even of sentient creatures. Self-consciousness is the corner-stone of comparative psychology taken in its widest sense; and comparative psychology so understood must have a great future before it, as it is a vast realm many territories of which have hardly been even begun to be explored.

The foregoing observations may so far suggest how much would be lost were agnosticism to succeed in discrediting the testimony of self-consciousness. The history of philosophy shows that agnosticism has made many attempts with that intent. Therefore I must briefly refer to the chief arguments it has employed.

Hume, as has already been indicated, sought to justify his scepticism by the reduction of consciousness to a succession of momentary and unconnected states. He could have taken no more direct way to attain his end, and he boldly declared that a study of consciousness shows that "what we call a mind is nothing but a heap or collection of different perceptions, united together by certain relations, and supposed, though falsely, to be endowed with a perfect simplicity and identity." But he failed to make good the assertion. His appeal to consciousness was vitiated by his exclusively empirical way of looking alike at nature and mind. What was inconsistent with his theory of knowledge he simply refused to see; and unfortunately any reasonable theory of self-identity—any theory of real self-identity—was inconsistent with it. When conscious at all *he certainly always found himself conscious of what he called ideas, impressions, per-*

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*ceptions*; but he could not with any consistency fully acknowledge that fact, and hence he had to say that he was conscious only of being a series of ideas and impressions, a heap or collection of perceptions, and that continuity of being and self-identity were “fictitious”—*i.e.*, illusions. None the less, however, was the self—his own self—existent and present although he chose to overlook it, and none the less were the ideas, perceptions, and impressions experienced states or acts of that self. He was always conscious of it as conditioning and sustaining his varying mental states, as present in and with every feeling he realised, every thought he formed, every resolution on which he acted. The self is permanent and ever present in consciousness, and therefore the continuous subject of consciousness, as well as an indubitably possible object of introspective and reflective inquiry. Hume was a habitual and, when unbiassed, very competent observer of the facts of consciousness, and that he certainly could not have been without the help of the self and self-consciousness which he pretended to be unknown or non-existent. His whole work as a psychologist was a practical demonstration that he could himself do what under the influence of a false theory he professed could not be done.

Mr. Herbert Spencer has affirmed self to be unknowable, and has denied that what is called self-consciousness is knowledge. “The personality,” he says, “of which each one is conscious, and of which the existence is to each a fact beyond all others the most certain, is yet a thing which cannot be truly known at all, knowledge of it being forbidden by the

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very nature of thought.”<sup>1</sup> For thinking so he has given two reasons, one drawn from “the extent of consciousness” and another from “the substance or nature of consciousness,—its primitive dualism.” The latter has been employed by so many other writers that, in connection with Mr. Spencer, I need only refer to the former. It is to this effect. Consciousness exists only as a chain of states, a series of subjective modifications. But the chain or series can be neither infinite nor finite: not infinite, for an infinite quantity is a contradiction; and not finite, for we can comprehend neither the beginning nor the end, neither the first nor the last link or term of it. Hence, according to Mr. Spencer, it is unrepresentable, and consequently unknowable. Consciousness as it cannot be perceived cannot be represented, and being unrepresentable must be also unknowable.

The argument, however, seems quite inconclusive. All that it really shows appears to be the impropriety of employing a word in an arbitrary manner. The very term *consciousness* implies that it includes knowledge. What right has any individual philosopher to assume, and to argue on the assumption, that there is no *scientia* in it? Every one, Mr. Spencer not excepted, regards the immediate data of consciousness as the most certain and indubitable of facts and of apprehensions of fact. Personality, Mr. Spencer himself expressly tells us, each one is conscious of, and its existence is to each one a fact beyond all others the most certain. But if so, if immediate and indubitable consciousness of self or personality

<sup>1</sup> *First Principles*, Pt. I. ch. iii. § 20.

as a fact, if the most certain of all apprehensions of reality, be not knowledge, what is knowledge, or what else can be better entitled to be called knowledge? It is surely even more worthy to be called knowledge than any perception of sense or any apprehension of what can be figured or pictured by the understanding with the help of imagination. There is no knowledge superior to the testimony of self-consciousness. It is easier to err as to what one sees than as to whether or not one is conscious of seeing. Self-consciousness is the fundamental presupposition of all knowledge,—that alone which cannot but be known along with all knowledge, and apart from which there can be no knowledge.

The objection which has been most frequently urged against the possibility of self-knowledge is that self the subject of knowledge cannot be also the object of knowledge. Broussais, Comte, Maudsley, Spencer, and others have employed it. Yet it is not a very serious objection. It may even without much presumption be doubted if it require an answer. That along with whatever is known self is known is a universally experienced fact, and hence whoever urges the objection in the very act of doing so contradicts himself. Every one who denies that he knows himself is conscious of knowing himself in the very act of denying knowledge of himself;—as consciously and certainly aware of his knowledge of himself as of his denial of it. What is the use, however, of arguing against a fact so attested? What can it avail to reason so irrationally? “Facts are chiefs that winna ding,” says the poet. And of all facts that of self-

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knowledge can least be “dung”—can least be broken down or thrust aside.

To endeavour to justify doubt or denial of the possibility of self-knowledge by representing self-reflection or introspection as a mere gazing *in vacuo* is a very futile procedure. There is no warrant for so restricting internal observation as to exclude from it the placing oneself in those positions in which such observation is alone possible. The intelligent student of mental phenomena does not attempt to analyse them or to discover their laws by mere vague unregulated peering and spying into himself. He recalls and reproduces them as they have occurred in his own experience and takes account of how they have been described by others; reflects on how his own and other minds have worked in diverse situations; analyses the conceptions and notes the shades of sentiment of which language is the expression; traces the trains of thought and phases of emotion mirrored in literature; and studies humanity in action as portrayed in history. The psychologist is none the less of a psychologist because he requires in studying the human consciousness to look into men's faces, listen to their words, read their books and biographies, &c., seeing that his special business in doing so is not with the features of faces, sounds of words, or letters of books,—not with what his eyes and ears present to him but with what his mind apprehends, analyses, and otherwise deals with,—not with phases or processes of matter but with states or functions of consciousness,—not with the physical but with the psychical.

## BROUSSAIS AND CONSCIOUSNESS

The French physician Broussais published in 1828 a treatise entitled *De l'Irritation et de la Folie* which attracted much attention and was largely a polemic against consciousness. He did not deny that consciousness bore a testimony which could not be wholly ignored, but he admitted even that grudgingly, and represented its testimony as insignificant, and indeed as confined to a single fact—the bare assertion that one feels that one feels. Consciousness had, he maintained, nothing properly its own. All its contents he traced to the senses. “A reasonable man,” he declared, “cannot admit the existence of what is not demonstrated by some sense” (*op. cit.*, ii. 6); and, speaking of his opponents, he said,—“We defy them to find a single idea in their psychology which is not copied from some object or scene of nature” (ii. 22).

Both statements are misleading. A reasonable man, if he exercise his reason aright, cannot fail to admit the existence of what is not demonstrated by any sense. Thoughts and feelings, desires and volitions, undoubtedly exist, and as undoubtedly it is not by any sense that their existence is demonstrated. Who ever saw, smelled, heard, touched, or tasted them? Further, even if we suppose it to be true that every idea is copied, as Broussais asserted, from some object or scene of nature, he inferred too much from it. On what ground did he himself suppose it true? Only on the strength of an argument to the effect that *the words used to express psychological facts have primitively served to designate purely physical facts*. An argument to that effect, however,



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is not only inadequate but irrelevant. Proof that the words used to express psychological facts have primitively served to designate purely physical facts is no proof that the two classes of facts—the psychological and physical—are themselves identical. The objects of sense attract attention before there is reflection on states of mind. The organs of sense are actively occupied before there is any attempt at introspective exertion. Hence language is from its very origin so steeped in sense that it can never be completely spiritualised; and hence also although we can indicate and illustrate the things of the spirit in the terms and imagery of sense, our power to reverse the process is exceedingly limited. That the words used to express psychological facts were evolved out of words which primitively designated physical facts is very probably true, and certainly a vast amount of evidence may be brought forward in favour of it; but even were its proof absolutely complete it would be no proof of what Broussais wished to establish. Further, words never designate *purely physical facts*. They designate only facts which are dependent not only on the properties of external objects but also on the constitution and activity of the self or subject of knowledge. The objects and organs of sense give us no information apart from the subject or self. Broussais quite underestimated the influence and significance of the subjective factor in knowledge when he wrote as follows: “The senses can alone furnish us with correct ideas of bodies, and consciousness furnishes us with no other incontestable fact, no other fact which can dispense with the proof

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of the senses than the interior sensation. The testimony of consciousness is therefore not equivalent to that of the senses, and the science that one can draw from the first is soon attained, seeing that it reduces itself to an assertion. I am endowed with the faculty of feeling that I feel. But this assertion expresses a fact, and that is all " (*op. cit.*, ii. 27, 28). Coming from Broussais, a materialist so thorough-going that he would not admit the existence of anything spiritual in man, any specific self or soul, and who defined soul in the words *l'âme est un cerveau agissant et rien de plus*, the mere admission that consciousness has a testimony of its own to bear, a specific item to contribute to knowledge, is interesting and instructive; but he deplorably failed to see how much was involved in the fact which he recognised. The reality of self-consciousness, if a fact at all, is one of enormous significance. It means that without it there can be no knowledge; that with it all possible human knowledge is attainable; that it so enters into all human knowledge that to speak of "purely physical facts" is foolish talk, as no such facts are known to man or knowable by him; and that the testimony of consciousness, instead of being "a poor and insignificant fact," is one of extraordinary wealth and importance.

Exaggeration of the dependence of consciousness on physiological conditions is another way in which the discrediting of the testimony of self-consciousness has been attempted. Gall, Spurzheim, Comte, Laycock, Ch. Robin, and many others have so proceeded. They have represented intelligence, feeling,

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emotion, and will as simply biological results, cerebral processes or changes. They would substitute for the direct, careful, and comprehensive study of the phenomena of mind study of the properties of the body, dissection of the brain, and psycho-physical experimentation. But obviously there are both narrowness and exaggeration in that view. There is undoubtedly a close connection between mental states and physical conditions, but what the connection is and how far it extends can only be ascertained by those who make use of the methods and results of both physiology and psychology, not of those who sacrifice the rights of either to those of the other. Introspection and external observation are distinct, and hence psychology and physiology have each their own sphere. The phenomena which are the proper objects of study of either are not resolvable into the phenomena which have to be dealt with by the other, so that they are independent although closely related sciences. No one has sought more strenuously than Dr. Maudsley to identify brain with mind by breaking down what he calls "the absolute and unholy barrier set up between physical and psychical nature." But with what result? The plain and often repeated contradiction of his own teaching; as also his enforced admission that the observation of physical objects, the closest study even of the brain and nerves, cannot give us even the least direct information as to feelings, ideas, and volitions, any more than material changes even in the brain and nerves can be known by mental introspection.

The untrustworthiness of self-consciousness has

## IMPORTANCE OF KNOWLEDGE OF SELF

been affirmed on another ground, namely, that in many cases the sensations are so perverted that the idea of the self is lost, and even that the idea of another self is not infrequently substituted for it. In other words, the delusions of the insane as to consciousness and self-identity have been brought forward to destroy confidence in the testimony of consciousness. The reality of numerous facts of the kind must be admitted. There are illusions of introspection as well as of perception or memory. The insane often fancy themselves to be not themselves but other selves, kings, queens, sages, or other historical personages. The shepherds of Arcadia, the aborigines of Brazil, and the Indians of North America have been described as apt to be subject to the delusion that they were wild animals, and as under the influence of the delusion acting accordingly. The abnormal facts referred to, however, fail to prove either that knowledge of the true self is lost or that knowledge of the false self is substituted for it. As regards the former proposition, there is no difficulty in showing that a consciousness of self remains amidst all the perversion and confusion of ideas prevalent in the madman's brain; and as regards the latter, it can as easily be shown that the man who fancies himself another self still believes that he is himself. The charge of untrustworthiness which has been brought against self-consciousness has not been substantiated. Those who have urged it—most of them have been physicians—have themselves had to trust the consciousness of the insane, as no otherwise could they have distinguished between mendacity

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and insanity. The hallucinations of the insane are not falsehoods or fictions, but true and real as facts of consciousness.

Enough, I think, has now been said to show that even *self* may be made the object of agnostic attacks; that even the testimony of self-consciousness may be disputed and rejected. The very existence of self may be called in question. The very possibility of knowing it may be denied. Yet there is no rational or practical dubiety as to either the existence of self or the reality of a knowledge of it. There is nothing of which a man is more certain than that he is; that he is conscious that he is; and that his consciousness that he is is a knowledge on which he may reasonably and confidently rely.

Self-consciousness, however, is not merely a kind of knowledge. It is also the fundamental condition and universal accompaniment of every kind of knowledge. Further, it is at once the root-principle of knowledge and the knowledge which possesses the highest certitude. Nothing is surer in the consciousness of any self than that itself is itself. Without that certitude there could be no other certitude, no other firm conviction or trustworthy experience. Even if neural and mental processes were to take place they would be unfelt and unintelligible, and the whole body and mind in which they occurred would be a chaos without unity, order, or purpose. Hence the importance of the fact that each self so far as conscious is always self-conscious. But it does not follow that each self has always either a profound or comprehensive self-consciousness. That is, in

## KNOWLEDGE OF SELF DEFECTIVE

fact, far from being the case. "Know thyself" is a precept not easily obeyed. Men are often more alive to the defects of their neighbours than to their own. Beneath the surface clearness of immediate self-consciousness there are dark depths of unconsciousness which few care or try to explore, yet the reality of which cannot be doubted. What they contain come at times to light in the great crises of life, in seasons of temptation, excitement, and revolution, or in strange and abnormal experiences. They may also be to some extent apprehended through patient and thoughtful self-examination, through the study of other selves, and attention to the results which have been attained by psychology normal and morbid, human and comparative. Those, however, who have advanced the farthest in self-knowledge are just those who will be the readiest to admit that their knowledge is neither comprehensive nor profound. Each man knows himself with absolute certainty as a fact. And yet every truly intelligent man is aware that each man's self has even to himself much that is most mysterious and seemingly inscrutable. Around each man's little sphere of self-knowledge there stretches immeasurable self-ignorance.

Self may be the one thing we know best. It is certainly the one thing which we have always with us. Yet our knowledge of it is of the same limited and defective kind as our knowledge of the other ultimate objects of knowledge. The very fact that self is the universal element in cognition makes it impossible that it should be apprehended as either an exclusively and completely known object or as a



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directly and entirely known subject. Hence self-knowledge seems to be at once the most certain and the most mysterious kind of knowledge.

Self involves many great mysteries. Its *origin* is a mystery, and one which it has been attempted to elucidate by various forms of *creationism*, *emanationism*, and *traducianism*, none of which are generally recognised as satisfactory. The *seat* of self is a mystery. Many have endeavoured to localise it, to trace it to some focus or nerve-centre of the bodily organism. Apparently they have as yet failed. To refer it to the brain is no explanation so long as the relations between the brain on the one hand and consciousness or psychical activity on the other are not much better known than they as yet are. The *unity* of the self is a mystery. It is a marvellously complex unity, one which includes all that the mind is and is capable of,—its self-activity, its states of sentiency and emotion, its intellectual operations, its moral and religious endowments,—and it is nevertheless the most perfect type of creaturely self-identity. Hence its simplicity is as exceptional as its complexity. Its *ubiquity* in relation to the body is a mystery. Its action on the body is co-extensive with the body, yet it has no extension and is indivisible. Its ubiquity with reference to the body may be deemed like the Divine ubiquity with reference to the universe, inasmuch as the human self is present throughout the whole body as regards power yet does not occupy different points of space by different parts of its own mass. The *union of spirit and matter, mind and body*, in each human self, although

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an indubitable fact, is a no less indubitable mystery, —a problem which has occupied the minds of theologians and philosophers in many ages and lands, but which is still unsolved. Further, the *destination*, like the origination, of the self is a great mystery, and also one of intensely practical interest. Hence many vain hypotheses have in all ages been current regarding it. Hence also scepticism as to the worth of all thought on the subject is wide-spread. Doubtless the truth regarding it lies between the extremes of imaginative or dogmatic credulity and agnostic unbelief. The right attitude towards it is consciousness of our need of fuller light regarding it, and a reasonable faith that with the growth of self-knowledge and growth in the knowledge of God and His works all needed light will not fail to be thrown on it.

As each human self is, as we have just seen, so mysterious even to itself, why should knowledge even of the Divine self be deemed impossible merely because of mysteriousness? Why should the mysteries connected with God's nature and ways be deemed inconsistent with a real and progressive knowledge of God, when such mysteries as those which have just been referred to are certainly not incompatible with any man's knowledge of himself, or of any other human self? Self-knowledge is a real and most valuable knowledge, in which it must be a man's own fault if he fail to make steady progress; and encompassed as it is with mystery it is not only, within its own limits, of all our knowledge the surest, but also the key to all other knowledge than self-knowledge. Each man is a self, and, in the measure

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that he knows himself, is capable of knowing any other human self. Each man as a self has a body far more intimately related and thoroughly subject to him than are any other corporeal things, and a knowledge of his own body makes the knowledge of all other corporeal things comparatively easy to him of acquirement. Each man as a self is both soul and body. Hence he can learn to know his fellow-men as both spiritual and physical beings. Hence he can even learn to regard the Universe itself as a mighty whole whose body is Nature and whose soul is God.

### IV. AGNOSTICISM AS TO THE WORLD

By the term world is here meant what is called the external world, and, consequently, it is equivalent in signification to physical nature and the material or corporeal universe. The terms nature, world, and universe may all serve to designate the second ultimate object of knowledge, if only it be understood that they are not so used in the widest sense which they can bear, one in which they are not unfrequently employed. They may be so applied as to include what is meant by the terms which denote either of the other ultimates of knowledge, but should manifestly not be so applied here. Here by the word nature is to be understood merely physical, not psychical, nature; by world, the material world as distinguished from any real or imaginary spiritual world; and by universe, the whole system of bodily or corporeal objects. In justice to the materialist, as well as to avoid ambiguity, I must so employ them.

## GREATNESS AND LITTLENESS OF NATURE

A self-consistent and thorough materialist cannot admit that there is any nature except physical nature, any world which is incorporeal, any such reality as either a spiritual self or a Divine Being. But he has never succeeded in justifying his opinion, or proving more than what no one denies, namely, that the physical are, so far as human knowledge extends, closely conjoined and associated; that selves or subjects are intimately related to non-selves or objects; that mind is united to matter, consciousness to what is corporeal. All that we freely grant while decidedly rejecting his materialism. God cannot be reasonably thought of otherwise than as everywhere present and active in the universe. Human selves are certainly present in the body here on earth, and other selves may very possibly be similarly present in other planets. Merely as bodily objects all men are as truly parts of the material world as any other bodily objects. But men are not mere objects, mere bodies; they are also subjects, selves, beings that are conscious of their own existence, feelings, perceptions, volitions, judgments, &c.; and as such each man is what the material universe is not. Hence all men are so far differentiated from all physical nature, from the whole corporeal world. The world in so far as known to us is not a subject or self, not a conscious ego or spiritual being. It is a vast material system composed exclusively of objects or bodies.

Sublime and marvellous, therefore, although the world even in the sense indicated is, it cannot be reasonably regarded otherwise than as lower than the least of the self-conscious and rational creatures con-

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tained in it. Feeling and thought, and especially love and righteousness, although not themselves of the world, are what give to the world its glory and chief value. To that precious truth Pascal has given exquisite expression in words widely and familiarly known, but which will only be deemed superficial or trite by the foolish:—

“Man is the feeblest reed in nature, but he is a reed that thinks. It is not necessary that the entire universe should arm itself to crush him. A vapour, a drop of water, suffices to kill him. But though the universe should crush him, man would still be more noble than that which kills him, because he knows that he dies, while the universe knows nothing of the advantage which it has over him. Hence all our dignity consists in thought. It is by this, not by the space or time which we cannot fill, that we are to elevate ourselves. Let us labour, therefore, to think aright: behold there the beginning of morality.”<sup>1</sup>

In those words Pascal reminds us alike of the greatness and littleness of the universe, and at the same time of our own littleness yet possible greatness.

Man is a mere transient speck on the surface of the earth, and his strength is as nothing in comparison with the power of the universe. Yet he can do what it cannot, and make himself far superior to it, for he has reason and conscience. Right thinking transcends in worth all material greatness, yet there is what is far superior even to it. The glory of right thinking is that it makes possible morality, and is the principle and instrument of ethical excellence. Were there a merely material universe,—were there nothing in creation to reveal intelligence and love

<sup>1</sup> *Pensées de Pascal*, t. ii. p. 84 (ed. Faugère).

## OTHER WORLDS MAY BE INHABITED

and minister to the needs of sentient and moral beings,—the question, What is the good of it? would be one which could be neither asked nor answered. It has been told of Coleridge that when asked, What can be the use of the stars if they are not inhabited? his reply was, “ Perhaps it may be to show that dirt is cheap.” And whimsical as such a suggestion may well seem, would it not be difficult to suggest a better could be shown that none of the enormous material worlds visible from our earth had any living and conscious creatures, any rational or moral beings, in them? Considering how multitudinous and immense the starry worlds are, no wise man, I think, will venture to pronounce them uninhabited until he has evidence enough for believing them to be so. Astronomers have counted vastly more than a hundred millions of stars which are not planets but suns, around which planets are probably revolving as our earth and its companion planets are revolving round our sun. The planets of those far-off suns may be as large or larger than those in our system, but owing to their distance from the earth they are invisible to our astronomers even through their most powerful telescopes. Is it credible that the millions of worlds in the universe, our own only excepted, are all mere masses of material dross, are all empty tenements? If it be found that they are so, agnostic atheists will have a far weightier reason for their unbelief than any which they have as yet been able to urge. No such discovery, however, seems in the least likely to be made. Far more probable is it that other worlds are so far like our own as to be ruled



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and developed not only in accordance with the same physical laws, but also with essentially the same rational and moral laws. To leap to the conclusion that nowhere except on earth are there sentient, intelligent, and moral beings, seems to show a credulity which can have no other sources than human conceit or agnostic atheism itself. To believe that the whole material universe, inconceivably vast although it be, is under the same government as that which rules on earth, may be incapable of being confirmed either by strict logical demonstration or scientific observation. It is, however, a manifestly reasonable faith. Until disproved, the balance of reason seems to be clearly on the side of those who think of other worlds than our own as not wholly unlike our own, not merely what I have called masses of material dross and empty tenements, but rather as the many mansions and vast realms which the Author, Father, and Ruler of all has provided for the manifestation of His own nature and for the welfare of His creatures, children, and subjects.

The external world, what is called the physical universe, has not always been regarded as merely physical. It has often, and at all stages of culture, had life and consciousness attributed to it. Nature-worship has been a very prevalent form of worship, and one which has assumed many phases. The heavens and the earth were widely honoured in ancient times as the father and mother of the gods. The stars, the winds, rivers, mountains, and even what seem to us the most insignificant of creatures, have been deified. The very stocks and stones have been

## NO ABSOLUTE KNOWLEDGE OF MATTER

invested with the attributes of personality and worshipped. Philosophy has been influenced by that crude theology and has followed in the same course. Hylozoism, which ascribes to matter life, self-activity, and other psychical properties, was a prevalent form of Greek philosophy throughout its whole history; reappeared in force at the Renaissance; received in later times the approval even of a Cudworth and H. More; found in France during the eighteenth century Diderot, Robinet, and other advocates; and still has adherents in contemporary monists, as, *e.g.*, in S. Hartmann and Häckel. All pantheism strictly so called seems to proceed on the assumption that God and the world are essentially identical. But wherever such identification is completely effected the pantheism ceases to be a true theism, and indeed issues either in atheism or acosmism,—either in the absorption of God in the world or of the world in God. Hence also it inevitably leads either to mysticism or to scepticism, both of which can be shown to have always led to the sacrifice, or rather suicide, of reason. It is well to recognise that God and the universe are intimately connected, but most unwise to regard them as one and the same. Such a confusion of the Divine and the corporeal, it must be added, leaves no solid foundation for the physical sciences. If the world be one with God, if it be an infinite and eternal self or spirit with all the attributes of a self or spirit in supreme perfection, how can mechanics, physics, chemistry, physiology, &c., be trustworthy as sciences? To the extent that matter is dematerialised, spiritualised, and deified, should

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it not be withdrawn from the spheres of knowledge with which the physical sciences are now conversant, and transferred somewhere else where it can be dealt with as a kind of psychology and theology? Logical consistency would seem to demand the transference. There can be no doubt, however, that the practical result of it would be the bankruptcy of the sciences referred to.

The world of bodies is closely connected with the world of selves. In order that there may be knowledge, the first and second ultimate objects of knowledge must conjoin and co-operate. The cognition of matter implies not only the presence of matter but a mind's apprehension of it. The world is wholly unknown to us except as effectively related to us. We have no non-relative, no so-called absolute knowledge of it. In that respect, however, knowledge of the world is only like all other knowledge. The knowledge even of our own selves is no absolute knowledge. We can, it is true, make ourselves, and often do make ourselves, the objects as well as the subjects of our knowledge, but we never thereby so separate the self as subject and the self as object as to make either independent of or uninfluenced by the other. In studying the workings of our own minds we are even more apt to err through subjective faults than in studying the operations of external nature. We neither perceive nor conceive what either matter or mind is in itself. In both cases such knowledge as we can attain is not a subjective and an objective knowledge which we can treat as separate or separable. It is "an indivisible subjective-objective knowl-

## AGNOSTICISM AS TO THE EXTERNAL WORLD

edge," and there is no other knowledge, as Ferrier especially has conclusively shown. We can have a real knowledge both of matter and mind, both of an object and a subject, the one knowable and the other knowing, but we can know neither apart, and that for the simple reason that when apart there is no knowledge. The objective side of knowledge *per se* is not perceivable or even conceivable by any human mind. It is, as Ferrier says, "what we can neither know nor be ignorant of any more than we can think of a centreless circle or of a stick with only one end." Sheer nonsense, the entirely inconceivable, is neither knowledge nor ignorance. A subjective side without an objective side is, of course, as absurd as an objective without a subjective. All our conceptions of the world are dependent on our perceptions of it, and the latter are all largely what they are not merely through the world and its contents being in themselves what they are, but also owing to what our senses and bodily and mental constitutions are. Outward nature presents a very different appearance to a clear and healthy eye than to a jaundiced and diseased one. "The eye sees only what it brings with it the power of seeing." Nor is it otherwise with the mind. In a pure and pious soul both the world and God are quite otherwise reflected than in a selfish and sensual one.

There certainly is an agnosticism which displays itself as doubt or disbelief of the external world. The ordinary man, it is true, does not entertain such doubt or disbelief. Although at exceptional moments he may feel uncertain whether he is awake or asleep,

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perceiving or dreaming, seeing or merely imagining what he sees, his ordinary condition is that of trust in the reality of the objects of the senses. That does not imply that he conceives himself to apprehend by sense things exactly as they are to all other beings. An observant savage cannot fail to perceive that the senses of many animals differ from, and are even in various respects superior to, his own. The actions and habits of brute creatures plainly show that odours, savours, and colours cannot be to them just what they are to men. And men themselves differ greatly from one another in respect to those things. Certainly nothing warrants us in attributing to common humanity faith in metaphysical "things-in-themselves." Such faith is confined to a comparatively few philosophers. The relativity of knowledge, on the other hand, is, more or less distinctly, recognised even by those who have not the least tincture of philosophy. To believe in an external world is one thing; to believe in an external world *per se* and not *cum alio*,—unperceived, that is to say, by any mind human or superhuman,—is another and very different thing. The former belief is intelligible, the latter is unintelligible. To affirm that the world is external and material merely implies that it is not composed of the subjective states and experiences of sentient beings, whereas to affirm that it is external and material *per se*—*i.e.*, without any reference to a knowing mind or minds—is equivalent to asserting that it is an object or complex of objects which can have no subject, and which is entirely non-phenomenal, imperceptible, and unintelligible.

## AGNOSTICISM AS TO AN EXTERNAL WORLD

Agnosticism in the form of doubt or disbelief as to the external world naturally arises from the disappointments which that world produces. The things of sense are limited, unsatisfying, and often deceptive. The mind cannot find in them the reality, self-consistency, or satisfaction for which it craves. Hence a main cause of the divine unrest which impels the human spirit to seek for higher things and exercise religious and philosophical thought. And it is only when such thought has come to be earnestly exerted and considerably developed that agnosticism as to the external world has asserted its right to recognition. So long as it is not felt to be necessary to subject to criticism the perceptions of the senses they are regarded as the most reliable data or materials of knowledge, but when they come to be questioned and tested the naïve faith in their trustworthiness begins to fade and fall away. Reasons for doubt emerge and multiply. It is seen that the certainty spontaneously attributed to the senses is excessive; that their testimony is much more limited, relative, and insecure than had been supposed. The consequences are that man's attitude towards the world is radically altered; that the human mind enters on a new era of its history; and that agnosticism as to external things appears either in religious or metaphysical forms of *illusionism*.

In India, where from very early times the great concern of life was felt to be religion, the Hindu mind worked out in Brahmanism the doctrine that the Divine was the sole reality, the all in all, and yet the wholly unknown or even unknowable, while it



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represented the material world as but "the veil of *Mâyâ*," a delusion and snare by which the truth is hidden from men. In Buddhism scepticism as to the reality and worth of physical things was not less radical than in Brahmanism. Deliverance from the coils of existence seemed to its adherents true blessedness, the repression of individuality a constant duty, and Nirvana the chief good.

It was not so in Greece. Not ascetic withdrawal from the world but complete self-development in it was generally felt by the ancient Greeks to be the true ideal of life. They were keenly alive to the beauties of nature, felt to the full the joy of life, and rejoiced in the search for truth, alike for the sake of the search and for the sake of the truth. What Lessing said of himself with respect to truth—namely, that he even preferred the pursuit of it to the possession, the chase to the prey—may be said of most of the old Greek philosophers. In that respect they were very unlike the chief Oriental teachers with whom doctrine or devotion was ever the main thing. And yet when philosophical thought in Greece gave rise to ontological systems, the solutions of the problem as to the reality and existence of the external world given to those systems had much in common with those of the Hindu theosophists. Even the initiators of Greek philosophy seriously occupied themselves with questions as to the difference between appearance and reality,—such questions as, What is and what merely seems to be? How is reality to be distinguished from semblance? By what criterion is truth to be separated from error?—and thereby showed that they felt

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how difficult it was to educe science from single material objects, or, in other words, to rise from particulars to universals so as to acquire true science, a wholly trustworthy knowledge. Plato, greatly influenced by Socrates, was, however, the first to deal with the subject in a really critical and comprehensive way. His precursors had differed greatly as to what was being (reality) and what appearance (illusion), and so had manifestly contradicted one another, and failed to rise above the world of deceptions and to enter into the world of eternal verities. He himself sharply distinguished reality from appearance, traced all reality to the eternal, the universal, the ideal, to first truths and ultimate ends, to the Supreme Good, the Absolute, the Divine, and relegated the world of changeful sensuous existence, of mere physical particulars, to the limbo of non-reality and self-contradiction. The world of the senses he held to be, except in so far as participant in the ideas of an eternal and unchangeable world, a false and imaginary world. Ideas as he conceived of them seemed to him to be the only realities, and the material objects regarded by others as the only realities he deemed to be, properly speaking, unreal. As Croom Robertson has well said, "Platonic Realism and Platonic Idealism are one and the same doctrine, Plato being a Realist because of the reality he ascribed to ideas, and an Idealist because it is ideas to which he ascribed reality."<sup>1</sup> Once the claims of idealism had been so advocated as they were by Plato they could never again be ignored by philosophical thinkers.

<sup>1</sup> *Elements of General Philosophy*, p. 72.

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Once the reality of what appeared to be an external world was clearly shown to demand proof, the question, How is its reality to be either proved or disproved? necessarily came to be recognised as a fundamental and most important one. The history of philosophy amply attests that it has been regarded as such by many of the clearest and profoundest of human thinkers. It also shows that, like the question as to the existence and reality of a spiritual world, the question as to the existence and reality of a physical world is one which has come to stay. Long as it has already been with us there are no signs of our getting rid of it.

From the time of Plato to the close of Greco-Roman history scepticism as to the material world was as prevalent in the philosophic schools as scepticism with regard to the spiritual world. In medieval Europe there was comparatively little scepticism of either kind. That was due, however, to the altogether exceptional strength of the convictions and causes which during that section of history gave an extraordinary predominance to faith over reason, to traditional dogma over personal investigation, and to social authority over private judgment. For many medieval doctors the first verse in Genesis must have seemed a conclusive reason for belief in the reality of the external universe. The great mental and social revolution, however, which introduced the modern era of philosophy, received into its bosom the thoughts and theories of the philosophers of antiquity regarding the external world, and gave them fresh life which produced new developments. Hence during

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the whole history of modern philosophy there has been a continuous criticism of the grounds and various forms of belief in a material world,—a continuous criticism which has greatly influenced the entire course and character of modern philosophy. That it has done so for good cannot reasonably be doubted. Modern scepticism as to the reality of an external world will be denied by the majority of the students of philosophy to have succeeded in proving itself true, but few competent judges among them will fail to acknowledge that it has amply justified its existence and activity by the extent to which it has contributed to the general progress of philosophy and even of science.

There is, I believe, a widely prevalent impression that while there has been a vast amount of doubt or disbelief as to the existence of God, there has been little or none as to the existence of a material world. It is one, however, which is not in accordance with facts, and which can exist only where there is great ignorance of the history of philosophical thought. The external world has no more had immunity from agnostic attacks than the other ultimates of knowledge. The most rapid glance over the history even of modern philosophy is sufficient to show us that agnostic solutions of the problem as to the existence of the world have been almost as common as agnostic solutions of the problem as to the existence of God. Descartes and his followers regarded matter as an object not of perception but merely of conception, and rested the reasonableness of belief in an external world on faith in the Divine veracity. Malebranche

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held all physical things to be only visible in God. Agnosticism as to matter was implied in the pantheism of Spinoza and in Locke's view of secondary qualities. It found a much clearer and more consistent expression in Berkeley's immaterialism. According to Berkeley all our sensations and perceptions of so-called material objects are purely subjective phenomena, beyond which there is no reason to interpose anything between them and the supra-phenomenal power of which the sensible world is the expression; that is to say, he thought God and the soul to be a sufficient explanation of all the facts which ordinary men and the common run of philosophers are accustomed to ascribe to a real physical universe. Hume clearly saw the incompatibility of sensism and materialism, and that a thorough sensism like his own left no grounds for belief in a physical universe or in physical science. J. S. Mill's explanation of the belief in an external world was hardly less sceptical in character, attempting as it did to account for the widespread belief in the reality of the world by the association of ideas and the mind's capability of expecting them, and thus reducing the world of matter to a mere aggregate of *possibilities of sensation*. The Idealism of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, and the later forms of it which have appeared in all countries where philosophy is actively cultivated, prove that idealism is not less prone than sensism to originate and spread sceptical views of the material world. The thesis that external perception is a true hallucination has been maintained by Taine and Rabier with an ingenuity which has gained for it

## INCONSISTENCY OF MATERIALISM

the assent of a considerable number of contemporary psychologists.

The facts just referred to may have sufficed to show that to fancy the material world unassailable by agnosticism is an evidence of credulity explicable only by ignorance. The purport of them cannot be much affected by this other fact, that throughout the whole history of philosophy there has been a species of philosophy which has maintained matter to be the only ultimate object of knowledge,—the species so well known as materialism. It is a philosophy comparatively easy to popularise, but one which has seldom been found to satisfy critical and reflective minds, and one which has owed such success as it has attained more to the rhetoric than to the logic of its advocates. Not a few so-called materialists have been wronged by being so-called, as, *e.g.*, among English authors, Hartley, Priestley, the elder Darwin, and Horne Tooke, all generally designated materialists, but whose “materialism” did not imply denial of the existence of God, or exclude faith in Him as the author of nature and the father of spirits. Huxley and Herbert Spencer have often been very improperly described as materialists. To identify, as is frequently done, monism with materialism is an act of injustice to the former, seeing that the latter, resolving as it does everything into what is indefinitely, if not infinitely, divisible, is utterly anti-monistic.

Further, materialism strictly so called is always self-contradictory. It dogmatically affirms matter to be the sum, substance, and explanation of all things,



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yet has no other reason to give for the very existence of matter than the testimony of the senses. It has always to support itself on sensism, and therefore presupposes what it pretends to account for. The very senses, sensations, and perceptions on which materialists rely, and must rely, in order to warrant either their account of matter or even their affirmation of its existence, testify against them, by showing matter to be not even conceivable apart from mind, not the cause and substance of mind, but what is as dependent on mind as mind is on it, and even more so, inasmuch as mind may be its own object but matter cannot. To have a right to postulate matter at all the materialist must have a mind in order to get even the least conception of matter, and consequently must not objectify and glorify matter as a something prior to, or separable from, or independent of mind. The presupposition of materialism is a *hysteron-proteron*, and its course of self-defensive ratiocination is a see-saw process of continuous alternation which never reaches self-consistency. I have already, however, treated of materialism elsewhere so fully, both expositorially and critically, that I have no desire to deal further with it here.<sup>1</sup>

Agnosticism as to the external world is still not only possible but prevalent. There is even now no generally accepted demonstration of the reality of such a world. The problem as to matter is no more solved to the satisfaction of every one than the problem as to Deity. While as fully recognised as it ever was to be a real and fundamental philosophi-

<sup>1</sup> *Anti-Theistic Theories*, Lect. II.-IV.

## CERTAINTY AS TO EXTERNAL WORLD

cal problem, it is still one which is as much under discussion as it ever was. During the last forty or fifty years metaphysicians and psychologists have been concentrating their efforts and exerting their utmost ingenuity in attempts to answer it, and have in consequence brought to light various interesting facts in the departments of physiology, psychology, and general philosophy. They may thereby fairly claim to have considerably contributed to the explanation of the very complex and comprehensive process involved in the gradual acquisition of a knowledge of physical nature. They cannot, however, reasonably pretend to have made it impossible plausibly to deny the validity of perceptive knowledge, or even to call in question the very existence of the world as an external objective reality. Sceptical subjectivism can still give as specious, perhaps even more specious, reasons for its affirmations than it did before Müller, Helmholtz, Fechner, Wundt, Stumpf, Lipps, and others in Germany, and their coadjutors in France, Italy, England, and the United States, made known the results of their investigations. It can still meet all assertions of the reality of an external world with objections entitled to receive reasoned answers, and can even satisfactorily prove that much of what is generally regarded as objective both in perceptual and conceptual knowledge is really subjective.

There is a practically universal feeling of the certainty of an external world and an obtrusiveness in the presentation of the things of that world which make it very natural for mankind to suppose that there is a direct and immediate apprehension of matter far

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superior to any knowledge we can have of God. In reality, however, man has no more a direct and immediate perception of matter than of God. By not one of his senses is matter itself apprehended. At the utmost it is its phenomena or properties that are apprehended, and even they are not directly or immediately apprehended. Our supposed immediate apprehensions of matter are states of mind connected with matter through the action on our sentient organs and general mental constitution which give rise to the phenomena that we call physical, although they are largely psychological. Perceptions of external objects are dependent both on mental activities and on imperceptible external causes or conditions, such as ether-motions without and nerve-motions within the organs which yield sensations, say, of vision, touch, taste, &c. All the ultimate objects of knowledge,—matter, mind, and Deity,—are known by us in the same way. It is not by attempting to gaze directly into their ultimate natures or spinning logical cobwebs round our conceptions of them, but by laying our minds open to receive aright the impressions and lessons which the facts themselves can alone convey to us, that we come to know them.

The manifestations of what seem to be the contents of the world of matter are appearances or images beyond which lie the powers that by their action on the organs of sense and the energies of the mind produce those appearances or images. Hence knowledge of the world and knowledge of God are only to be obtained by us in the same way,—only by a continuous and rational use of all our internal powers acting and reacting on external powers and the

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impressions produced by them. It is not attainable in either case by instantaneous and direct perception, but by a natural and gradual process which is much more comprehensive and complicated than the great majority even of psychologists seem to be aware of. As regards both the world and God the process referred to depends subjectively on the constitution of a mind seeking to know, and objectively on the manifestations of the world or God to a mind so engaged.

What we call matter reveals to us not only itself but also human selves to themselves, and even God himself to thoughtful men. Each man manifests himself to other men by the motions and gestures of his body, the labours of his hands on material things, and the efforts and articulations which issue in sounds and words from the throat and lips, &c. To each man other men manifest themselves in the same ways. In like manner the phenomena of nature, with their manifold aspects, peculiarities, combinations, adaptations, evolutions, uses, and results, are media through which the Divine Mind may well be held to be expressing itself to other minds, human and superhuman, and working out great issues. That our knowledge of God and of the world are to a great extent and in various respects of the same nature is a very important fact and well worth attentive study. But important although it be I cannot dwell on it here. Nor is that necessary. It has often been referred to by English writers, and once at least most elaborately and conclusively dealt with. The ablest exhibition of the parallelism between knowledge of God and

knowledge of the world to be found in any language is that contained in R. A. Thompson's *Christian Theism* (*Burnet Prize Treatise*, 2 vols. 1855). Owing to its very thoroughness, however, it would be useless to refer non-metaphysical readers to it, but I would earnestly recommend to all my readers Mr. Thompson's brief and condensed statement in *Principles of Natural Theology* (1857) of the positive argumentation in his larger treatise. It is especially desirable that they should read ch. v. pp. 70-98: "Comparison of the Principles and Processes of the Mind, in the Attainment of its Theological and its other Knowledges." The twelve parallels there exhibited by comparison of the character and processes implied in our knowledge of God with those implied in other knowledge allowed to be fundamental, convincingly show that our knowledge of God is not dependent on formal demonstrations but given us through God's own manifestations of Himself in the facts of nature, consciousness, and history, and in the principles and conditions of our intellectual life.

The supposition that knowledge of matter is the most certain, immediate, and thorough knowledge is probably widely prevalent among the uneducated and unthoughtful, but it is entertained by few if any real thinkers or men of scientific reputation. It is quite unfair, although it has often been done, to describe men like, say, Huxley and Spencer, as materialists. Huxley's agnosticism was agnosticism as to matter itself. It implied no excess of confidence in the knowledge of matter or even in the existence of matter. So keen and clear a thinker as Huxley

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could not possibly be a materialist. He attempted, indeed, to express all knowledge in materialistic phraseology, as the most definite and self-consistent terminology which so-called exact science is able to make use of, but he took care to explain that he regarded such phraseology as, in reality, "a sort of shorthand idealism." He maintained that "what we call the material world is only known to us under the forms of the ideal world"; that "the very existence of 'Matter' ('Stoff') and 'Force' ('Kraft') is, at best, a highly probable hypothesis"; that "our certain knowledge does not go beyond our states of consciousness"; and that "our one certainty is the certainty of the mental world." Those fundamentals of Huxley's faith are, of course, far from sufficient to prove either the complete self-consistency or general satisfactoriness of his philosophical creed, but they conclusively show that he was no materialist, and that he clearly recognised self-consciousness to have a priority and certainty to external perception,—our knowledge of mind to be deeper and truer than our knowledge of matter.

There is still less reason for representing Mr. Spencer as a materialist. Huxley was not lacking in spiritual faith and reverence. Nor is Spencer lacking. His Infinite, Absolute, and Unknowable, which underlies, pervades, and transcends the material, relative, and knowable, is obviously to him no mere mystery or even mere ideal, but of all realities the most real, and somehow the life of all our being and the light of all our seeing. One may vastly prefer the Christian idea of God, but it is no mere



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negation of God, and manifestly while Mr. Spencer refuses to claim knowledge of it he has a faith in it which he feels to be deeper and truer even than any attainable knowledge of matter. Those who hold that they may humbly claim to have a knowledge of God will, of course, hold that such knowledge need not be less true and profound than knowledge of either matter or finite minds; nay, if truly conscious of union with God in knowledge they must realise, at least in some measure, that knowledge of God being the knowledge which God most especially gives cannot be other than knowledge at its highest and best. God knows us completely, and can manifest Himself to us far more closely and thoroughly than can any finite beings or material objects. To a human spirit there can be no experience so vital, profound, and instinctive as the spiritual experience which rests on Divine self-manifestation.

It is quite in accordance with the foregoing observations that the objections which have been urged, or may be urged, against the cognoscibility of an external world are substantially the same objections which have been, or may be, urged against the cognoscibility of God. The arguments employed by Hamilton, Mansel, and Spencer, for example, to prove that God cannot be known are of the same nature as the arguments which Descartes, Malebranche, and Hume had employed to show that there is no conclusive evidence for belief in the independent reality of an external world. The agnostic principles on which Hamilton and Mansel rested their

## KNOWLEDGE OF MATTER AND GOD

views as to man's knowledge of God cannot be confined to that or any special sphere of alleged or conceivable knowledge, but may be as appropriately applied in the same way to any or every other such sphere. The principles on which Hamilton and Mansel rested their defence of religious agnosticism,—(a) the conditionedness of thought, (b) the subjectivity of sensations, and (c) the relativity of knowledge,—are true and most important principles when correctly understood and applied, but they may be seriously misunderstood and misapplied, and were so by Hamilton and Mansel and their too trustful disciples. When rightly understood no agnosticism of any kind is implied in them; but when erroneous meanings are assigned to them, and to all of them such meanings have been assigned, they necessarily lead to agnosticism. That will be made apparent at a later stage when reference has to be made to the religious agnosticism of Hamilton and Mansel. Both the great Scottish and the great English logician failed to discriminate the different meanings which the terms in their so-called "laws of thought" could bear; both erroneously interpreted the terms they employed, so as to reject their true and proper meaning, and to impose on them significations which must necessarily lead to sceptical findings as to God. The same propositions interpreted and applied in the same perverse way must as necessarily lead to agnosticism as to matter and mind as agnosticism with reference to God.

The imperfections of our knowledge of matter ought to prevent us from rashly pronouncing it

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superior to knowledge either of mind or of Deity. By none of our senses is matter known otherwise than indirectly and defectively. What matter seems to us to be is very largely not what itself is but what our senses cause it to appear to us to be. The various properties of material things must necessarily have appeared very different to the innumerable species of animals which have been connected with them and dependent on them from the origination of creaturely life countless ages ago to the present day. Throughout all stages of life living beings of every kind have been gradually modified as regards size and form, structure and constitution, activity, sensibility, and intelligence, and all their perceptual knowledge must have been correspondently changed. The men of to-day are living in the age of scientists who, not content with the use of their natural organs of perception, are supplementing them with all the instruments and artificial contrivances which their ingenuity can devise, but not even to the greatest physicists having at command the most modern inventions does the world of the senses show itself exactly and exclusively as it is. The perceptual world as accepted even by the most advanced physical science is still not pure and naked reality, but to no inconsiderable extent made up of illusion and speculation. In fact it is largely of the nature of *Mâyâ*.

Further, however much we may admire modern physical science on account of its precision and usefulness, no thoughtful man can fail to be as much impressed with a sense of its shallowness as of its depth. It is soon at the end of its tether, and con-

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stantly reminding us of the extent of human ignorance even of matter. A few short stages take our greatest physicists to those elements of matter which are the farthest limits both of sense-perception and of physical analysis. Then they have to ask, What is matter? What is its really ultimate constitution? What comes after and accounts for the elements into which they have resolved it? But those questions at once take them beyond the material world,—outside any perceptual world,—and leave them where none of man's senses, even if aided by the most powerful instruments of research, has any information to give. The physicist in pursuit of the knowledge of matter comes speedily to where matter itself requires to be accounted for, and, as it does not account for itself, it has to be accounted for by what is different from itself, not material. He is thus forced to pass from the perceptual world to a conceptual or conjectural world to explain it, and of such worlds there are many competing for his attention. Matter and the material world have been accounted for by “atoms” (an hypothesis of which there are divers ancient and modern forms), “ether,” “metaphysical points capable of effort,” “indivisible unextended points surrounded by spheres of attractive and repulsive force,” “unextended spiritual forces or monads,” “permanent possibilities of sensation,” “groups or clusters of actual or expected sensations or ideas,” “non-matter in motion,” “objectified Divine thoughts,” “manifestations or outgoings of the Divine Will,” &c., &c. But can any one of those hypotheses be accepted as satisfactory? Has any one

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of them been either conclusively proved or disproved? Will any man who impartially examines them feel confident that he knows thoroughly what matter is? I think not.

It does not follow from what I have just been stating that any agnostic view either of the world or of physical science is a justifiable one, but it indicates that we must be content with such knowledge or science of the material world as alone seems attainable, and is at least all that we find ourselves to have really attained. There is a practically universal belief among men that there is an external world, as also that there are ample reasons for the belief,—for thinking that they know that there is an external world and know a good deal about it. For that belief there is ample justification, but only the same sort of justification as may be had for belief in God.

We believe that the contents of the world—the bodies of men (our own included), houses, trees, fields, &c.—although the ultimate grounds of them may be spiritual, are real external and material things. What reasons have we for so thinking? Such reasons as the following,—reasons which I must merely enumerate. 1°. Although our sensations and even perceptions are merely as psychical states wholly subjective—*i.e.*, internal not external phenomena—even physicists and psychologists find themselves compelled to connect those subjective states with objective causes and external conditions. The connections established between sensations of smell and motions in odorous objects, between sensations of hearing and vibrations of the minute parti-

## KNOWLEDGE OF MATERIAL WORLD

cles of the air, between such sentient impressions as those associated with the terms hardness, roughness, or elasticity and the arrangement of material particles or action of molecular forces, and between sensations of colour and the action of luminiferous rays on the fibres of the eye; and, in a word, all references of our sensations to physical causes, so far as they have been adequately justified, are due to an inductive process essentially identical with all sound scientific inductions. To deny their validity implies the non-validity of all inductive science.

2°. Man is in a large part matter. He has a body, and his body and mind are intimately connected, and influence each other to a great extent. Having a material body of his own he readily comes to know what matter and bodies are. He is conscious of his sensations of sound, colour, smell, touch, and sight as different not only in intensity and kind but also as different in place and time. Those sensations, although dependent on the brain, are not felt to be in the brain but in different parts of the body, and that either simultaneously or in succession. Hence knowledge of the difference between mind and matter, self and the world, is soon attained; and that all the more so because sensation itself is never alone but always conjoined with perception proper, is an act of knowledge of a non-ego which is either the body or material objects beyond the body. Perception attends all the senses, and not, as Herbart and Beneke supposed, merely touch and sight.

3°. Experience of the *resistance* of material objects to man's volitions and exertions has often been made



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the basis of an argument for belief in an external world, and the argument when properly stated may well be deemed valid. 4°. A kindred argument may be rested on the *persistence and permanence* of material objects, and may be easily so presented that no sane person will seriously attempt a refutation of it. 5°. Material objects give evidence of their reality as such in that they affect in the same way not merely some but all individuals, and that not only at rare or exceptional times, but whenever any one chooses to observe them. What is perceived by many or all as an external object cannot be reasonably regarded as a merely subjective state. That argument has been well presented in P. E. Dove's *Logic of the Christian Faith*. 6°. Closely connected with it, and seemingly as relevant and valid, is the argument which various scientists have rested on the law of conservation of matter and energy.

I have merely referred to the foregoing arguments because I have not attempted in this work,—not even in this chapter of it,—to treat of agnosticism as to the world in itself, but merely of agnosticism as to the world in relation to agnosticism as to God. The manifestations of the world itself to those who take the right way of apprehending them are the true bases of belief in and knowledge of it, and not otherwise is it as regards God. Both the world and God are known in much the same way. It is not by long-drawn-out formal proofs or demonstrations akin to those of geometry, but in both cases by an essentially practical and humble as well as reasonable way. If we candidly and earnestly seek to know God and

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nature, if we love, study, and co-operate with them, we shall assuredly grow continuously in the knowledge of them.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Dr. R. T. Smith's admirable work *Man's Knowledge of Man and of God*, six discourses delivered before the University of Dublin at the Donellan Lecture, 1884-85.

## CHAPTER VIII

### AGNOSTICISM AS TO GOD

#### I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS ON AGNOSTICISM AS TO GOD

It is now necessary to treat exclusively of the agnosticism which has a direct and special reference to the third great ultimate object of human thought,—the highest, the most comprehensive, and the most awe-inspiring object of thought which finite minds can entertain,—namely, God. To God all agnosticism as to religion, all agnosticism either of a religious or anti-religious kind, has a direct and special reference, and that necessarily, seeing that religion itself is essentially relationship, a felt and consciously realised relationship, of the human spirit to what it recognises as the Divine Being on which it is dependent. Whenever the human spirit rises into the sphere of true religious experience, and feels what life eternal means, it cannot fail to regard what seems to it the Divine as more truly, and in a stricter sense, an ultimate of thought than self or the world. The idea of it is more comprehensive and exhaustive both of knowledge and existence than either self or the world. Not self or the world but God only can be the *idea idearum* and *ens entium*. All selves except God's own self are dependent and originated selves, which owe what they are to Him in whom they live

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and move and have their being. All worlds are parts of the universe which has its unity in God, which has come from God, which is dependent on Him, and is what He has made and willed it to be. Its being is owing to His self-existence, its powers are also His powers, its constitution is His work, its laws and its ends are those which He has assigned to it, by which He rules it, and to which He guides it.

God is not only a higher and more comprehensive object of thought than human selves or material worlds, but also, as I have already had to indicate, one which is in a certain sense more definite and less ambiguous. Although the depths and mysteries in the Divine nature must far exceed and transcend the depths and mysteries in human nature and the material universe, the idea of God is clearer, more precise, and more exactly definable. No atheist or agnostic can reasonably pretend to be ignorant of what is meant by the term God as employed by an intelligent theist. The atheist denies that there is a God, but he cannot honestly disallow that he understands what is meant by the word. The agnostic denies that God is knowable, but not that the idea of God is either knowable or known. Were it either unknown or unknowable to him, his own agnostic reasoning must necessarily be absurd. Reasoning *to* the unknown or unknowable may well be regarded as a questionable process; reasoning *from* them is manifestly ridiculous folly.

The idea of God so underlies and conditions human experience and human thought that man may not unreasonably be held to be by nature in some

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measure a religious being. In all stages of his existence he appears to have had some anticipations and conceptions of God. Doubtless at first such anticipations and conceptions, if existent at all, which I do not dogmatically affirm, were very vague and crude, but so also were primitive notions of the world and souls. The measure of man's knowledge of God necessarily corresponds to the measure of his general enlightenment, as the measure of the latter no less necessarily does to the measure of the former. The worth of his thoughts of God, like his thoughts of man and nature, must on the whole be worth just what he himself is. The development of the idea of God and the course of the history of man are so dependent on each other that without a full recognition of the importance of either the other must be unintelligible. The meaning of history can become apparent only in so far as God's self-manifestation of Himself becomes visible in humanity, and it is becoming so realised now as it has never hitherto been. All the chief peoples of the world have now come, or are rapidly coming, to accept essentially the same idea of God. Christian missions have had directly and indirectly amazing success. Atheism has largely lost ground during the past century, and such successes as it has had have been due not to the influence of new reasons or of scientific discoveries, as some persons would pretend, but to political discontent and remediable social evils. Polytheism is rapidly disappearing. The various forms of monotheism are drawing closer to one another and centring in Christianity. One may almost say that in recent "world

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parliaments of religion " one and the same God was alone acknowledged and adored.

There is much more accordance of opinion as to what should be meant by " God " than as to what should be meant by " the world " or " the ego." It would be easy to fill a page with definitions of " God " which, although they might not be regarded perhaps as altogether faultless, would not be objected to as ambiguous. Two very common definitions of Deity are these: " God is the self-existent, infinite, and eternal Being, the Creator, Preserver, and Ruler of all," and " God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." Millions of intelligent persons will, without hesitation, accept either or both of them as a correct statement of what they believe God to be. Is there any definition of the " world " or " self " of which the same can be said? Is there indeed any definition whatever of " matter " which any considerable number of physicists, metaphysicists, or fairly well-educated men would agree to accept? I do not believe there is. There are about forty definitions of matter, each held by small groups only of physicists or metaphysicists, but not one which has found, or seemingly deserves to have found, general acceptance.

Agnosticism as to religion is essentially agnosticism as to God, the object of religion. There can be no religion where there is no faith in the Divine. The distinctive idea of religion is the Divine. Apprehension of the Divine is what is constitutive of all spiritual knowledge, just as apprehension of self is



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of all introspective and psychological knowledge, and as apprehension of the world is of all physical observation and science. The reasons given for disbelief in the Divine, when fairly and seriously examined, will rarely be found to be stronger than those which have been unsuccessfully urged in support of scepticism as to the world and selves. They are very apt, however, to seem stronger, as the knowledge of God, the highest and most precious of all knowledge, is the least likely of all and in reality the least of all, as I hope to show in this chapter, to be appreciated aright and sought for with all due earnestness and honesty.

Agnosticism regarded from a religious point of view may be religious, anti-religious, or simply non-religious. The agnosticism which is neither distinctively religious nor anti-religious but simply non-religious is the agnosticism which has no special reference to one more than to another of the ultimate objects of knowledge. In other words, it is the absolute or universal agnosticism with which I have already dealt, and which I do not require to take further into account. In a sense it is the only self-consistent agnosticism. Yet it is the least prevalent. And no wonder, for what it attempts to effect is to show that all supposed knowledge is really ignorance. But that would be equivalent to complete mental suicide, and humanity cannot be expected to commit *felo da se*. When such agnosticism is professed it generally seeks to conceal its real significance by a peculiar and improper use of the term knowledge. It proceeds on an ideally absolute view of knowledge, one which tran-

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scends all ordinary human knowledge, and denies to be knowledge all conception and thought which have not a comprehensiveness, exactness, and certitude incapable of being questioned or criticised. The agnostic standard of knowledge to which I refer is, in fact, the *docta ignorantia* which refuses to accept as knowledge anything presenting itself as such to which any objection can be taken or in which any imperfection can be found. Such a view obviously assumes that man is by the very laws and limits of his nature not merely the dependent and fallible being which he certainly is, but altogether incapable of ascertaining truth and acquiring knowledge, which he certainly is not.

The two forms of agnosticism which directly refer to God and religion are the theistic and anti-theistic, the religious and anti-religious. Both forms are not uncommon.

The latter is widely prevalent. The religious agnostic denies that we can know God, yet holds that without knowledge of Him we may legitimately believe in Him. What is distinctive of his agnosticism is its strange combination of professed ignorance of God with asserted faith in God; its deliberate conjunction of such apparently incompatible states of mind as scepticism with regard to religious knowledge and fideism with regard to religious belief. With reason it deals in a suspicious, critical, and negative way. With faith it deals in a credulous, dogmatic, and affirmative way. As regards both reason and faith it is always in excess, and in conjoining them, instead of harmonising them, it sets self-consistency

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at defiance. There are, as we shall see at a later stage, as many forms of such agnosticism as there are kinds of substitutes for religious knowledge put forward as legitimate bases of belief. It may suffice, however, to keep in view at present that it is inherently self-contradictory, inasmuch as it denies that we can know what God is yet affirms that God is, although entire ignorance of what anything is clearly and necessarily implies entire ignorance even that it is. We know that anything is only by having some knowledge of what it is. To know bare existence, pure being, is impossible and inconceivable. Such existence or being is a mere idol of extravagant speculation or unintelligible mysticism. Hence those who deny to man all knowledge of God in the ordinary sense of the term knowledge naturally substitute for it mystic means or acts,—ecstasy, absorption, direct vision, &c. Hence there is often much illusion and scepticism in mysticism and pantheism. Hence also there are forms of both hardly distinguishable from atheism.

The anti-religious agnostic maintains that we are both unable to know God and unentitled to believe in God. His attack on religion is consequently a more comprehensive one than that of the religious agnostic. It is an attack both on the knowledge and belief implied in whatever is worthy of the name of religion,—in all that can claim to be the soul's experience of intercourse with God. It has also a self-consistency which the assault of the religious agnostic does not possess. The alliance of agnosticism with fideism may have sentimental and practical advan-

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tages for the former, but it must in all cases bring with it great logical disadvantages. In all forms it is an unnatural alliance. Each species of fideism is an inconsistent kind of agnosticism. The substitutes for knowledge which fideism proposes are so many unsatisfactory bases of belief.

Both religious and anti-religious agnostics deny that man can attain to any real knowledge of God. In that they are agreed. And on account of their being so far agreed they may alike be regarded by self-consistent theists as holders of a positivist, empiricist, or naturalist creed. They are agreed in confining the whole sphere of possible knowledge to the examination, discrimination, classification, correlation, &c., of phenomena, physical or psychical. As regards knowledge of God, religious and anti-religious agnostics take up the same attitude. Both endeavour to persuade men that there is and can be no such knowledge, and that they ought to be content with unquestioning, unreasoned, and, what must seem to others at least, unenlightened belief. The religious agnostic's denial of knowledge of God is, however, much more dangerous and harmful than the anti-religious agnostic's denial. The latter is generally to a considerable extent discounted, while the former is apt to be much overestimated. The assaults of Sir William Hamilton and Dean Mansel on the evidences or rational bases of theistic belief made a vastly greater impression on the public mind than those of J. S. Mill, W. K. Clifford, and G. J. Romanes. That they had more relevancy or validity may well be questioned.

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Anti-religious agnosticism enters as an element into all anti-theistic theories. It is to be found in atheism, positivism, secularism, materialism, pessimism, &c. In those connections, however, I have already dealt with it somewhat fully in *Anti-Theistic Theories*. Here therefore I need only remind my readers that the reasons which anti-religious agnostics urge against belief in God are often those with which they have been supplied by religious agnostics. Anti-religious agnostics readily accept as reasons for disbelief in God reasons which religious agnostics urge against the claim to knowledge of God, yet maintain to be insufficient to warrant disbelief in God; that is to say, anti-religious agnostics, although holding a more consistent and so far stronger logical position than religious agnostics, often strangely attribute more weight to the arguments of those whom they deem credulous religionists than the latter themselves do. The same arguments which left Hamilton and Mansel sincere religious believers were largely received as necessarily and equally discrediting religious belief and religious knowledge. The most ingenious and subtle arguments which have been urged against theism as a doctrine which can be regarded as a real and trustworthy expression of knowledge of God have been oftener devised by theists than by anti-theists. Theists have been frequently the keenest, and, I venture to add, frequently the most cavilling and sophistical, critics of theism. Hence there is no necessity here for a separate examination of the special reasons of anti-religious agnostics. There is a singular lack of such reasons. I will, therefore, con-

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fine myself in this chapter to a consideration of the prevalence of anti-religious agnosticism and an indication of some of its causes.

### II. PREVALENCE OF ANTI-RELIGIOUS AGNOSTICISM

Anti-religious agnosticism is of all varieties of contemporary agnosticism the most prevalent, and also the most sincere and earnest. The agnostic movement in antiquity must have helped to undermine the classical theology or mythology, but at no stage of its course was it primarily or predominantly directed against it, but against knowledge as such, science in general, the claim to a rational certitude or well-grounded knowledge in any sphere. The Greek philosophical sceptics were not more hostile than other Greek philosophers to the religion of Greece, and would have deemed it a waste of their ingenuity and beneath their dignity as philosophers to direct their attacks chiefly against the religious beliefs of their countrymen. The popular Greek myths regarding the gods were too absurd to be argued against on agnostic principles; they could only be referred to in proof of the extraordinary credulity of mankind. The Greek philosophical sceptics, therefore, no more thought of spending their strength in assailing Greek mythology, than the so-called scientific agnostics of our own day deem it worth their trouble to attack the legends of the saints. The purer and higher elements in Greek religion they viewed not unsympathetically, having regard to their moral tendency and practical utility. In a word, the philosophical sceptics of the ancient classical world must be regarded



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not as anti-religious but as religious agnostics. They were "agnostics" inasmuch as they challenged the validity and certainty of what claimed to be religious knowledge as well as of all other forms and kinds of what is commonly called knowledge; but "religious" inasmuch as they did not infer that religion ought to be discarded or neglected.

The agnostic movement, after a long arrest, again made itself felt in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In ch. iii. I have dwelt on that stage of it at as much length as my space permitted, mainly in order to help my readers to realise that the scepticism of that remarkable period was, on the whole, a movement in defence of religion; that, speaking generally, its representatives were much less sceptical as to faith than as to reason, as to religion than as to science. The majority of them assailed reason in order to vindicate faith, and sought to exalt the authority of religion by pouring contempt on science. In other words, they inculcated what they regarded as scientific or philosophical scepticism in the interests of religious authority and religious dogma.

In the course of time, however, a great change has come over the sceptical spirit. The agnosticism of the present day is seldom directed against the persuasion of knowledge or the truth of science in general as was that of the Greeks. It is also rarely held to be valid with regard to reason and science but not to faith and religion, as that of the sceptics of the sixteenth and seventeenth century commonly was. On the contrary, it is only in reference to the spiritual

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and supernatural that agnosticism is now widely prevalent. In marked contrast to the agnosticism of former ages contemporary agnosticism is mainly occupied in endeavouring to show that ordinary experience and the positive sciences are to be received with deference and confidence, but that religion and revelation must be rejected as presenting only credentials which the human mind is incapable of testing and verifying. Although it is only in comparatively recent times that agnosticism has thus taken to singling out religion as the special object of its assault, the change of attitude has already become general.

The change indicated is all the more noteworthy because it is one far from obviously consistent or warranted; far from due to all other forms of agnosticism than the anti-religious having been completely refuted, or to the latter having been conspicuously confirmed.

Modern research has done extremely little to refute or even to weaken the sceptical contention for distrusting the testimony of the senses and suspending belief in the reality of the objects of perception and the existence of an external world. For although physics has brought many facts to light regarding the properties of matter, and physiology regarding the constitution of the organs of sense and the organic conditions of sensation, and psychology regarding the species, modifications, and relations of the sensations themselves, which were unknown to the philosophical sceptics of the Greco-Roman world, it cannot fairly be said that the facts referred to conclusively dispose of the sceptical objections to the veracity of the affirma-

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tions of sense, and may even be plausibly argued to be on the whole confirmatory of them. Physical science, numerous and wonderful although its discoveries have been, instead of having attained to a single certain and adequate conception of the nature of matter, has only suggested a multitude of dubious and conflicting hypotheses concerning it. The number of divergent and contradictory views as to what matter is, propounded in the present century, far exceeds the number entertained in the age of Pyrrho or Aenesidemus. Hence denial of its reality and affirmation of its illusoriness can certainly not be held to have been made less rational by the progress of physical science accomplished in the interval. The mystery of the connection between the physical impressions or changes on and in the organs of sense and the psychical states, affective and perceptive, constitutive of the sensations themselves, remains as dark and profound as when its existence was first recognised. The same may be said of the mystery of the connection between our perceptions and their objects. Physiology and psychology have both accumulated masses of facts which prove the subjectivity and relativity of our sensations, the two chief pillars of scepticism with reference to the things of sense. The difficulties raised by metaphysics as to our knowledge of the external world relate to the foundations or presuppositions of such knowledge, and consequently cannot be directly cleared away by the growth of sensible experience or by the findings of sciences derived from such experience. In a word, that all our perceptions are hallucinations and all their objects illusions is

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as plausible and credible a doctrine now as it ever was.

Yet there is little of such scepticism among us, and what little of it there is lacks thoroughness and robustness. Even two such courageous thinkers as Mr. Balfour and Dr. Gordy, although they maintain with the most commendable frankness and clearness that they have no *knowledge* of the external world, no rational grounds of belief for any matters of fact except states of present consciousness, assure us at the same time that they fully believe what they profess to be ignorant of and to have no reasons for believing. But a scepticism which thus defines itself to be “an intellectual recognition of the want of evidence without its consequent unbelief”; which thus represents itself as powerless on faith and conduct; which thus acknowledges that knowledge and ignorance, rationality and irrationality, are practically indifferent or alike to it,—surely in so doing also confesses itself to have little claim to be taken seriously. The mind and life of man cannot be so divided into two disconnected sections as such scepticism implies. Had we been able to do as well without reason as with it, in the way it assumes, we would surely not have been plagued with it. There is no fact more easily and certainly verifiable than the dependence of belief and action on knowledge and reason.

The scepticism which concludes that religious knowledge is unattainable is not only far more prevalent than the scepticism which seeks to discredit sensible knowledge, but also where present is much more powerful. Those who argue that they have no good

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evidence for the existence of the world, no sufficient reason for belief in the objects of sense, never fail to contradict themselves by practically accepting the testimony of their senses as if it were evidence of the strongest, reason of the best. Those who conclude that they have no valid evidence, no sufficient reason for belief in the existence and agency of God, are almost certain to infer that they have no right to believe in God.

The agnosticism which challenges the legitimacy of the processes and the truth of the results of the positive or empirical sciences is also at the present day seldom to be met with. Those among us who claim to be "scientific agnostics" mean by the claim that they are not agnostic so far as what they consider science is concerned, but only as regards religion or metaphysics. The agnosticism of the present day rarely ventures to attack reason within the limits of the sciences of things seen and secular. It generally treats as unassailable vast provinces of knowledge which the agnosticism of the past keenly and confidently attacked. The Greek sceptics made no such exemptions: they assailed all the special sciences which had begun to be cultivated in their time,—geometry, arithmetic, music, physics, logic, grammar, history, ethics, &c. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the scepticism which attacked positive science in the interest of religious faith was the commonest form of agnosticism. Now it is the rarest. It is only in comparatively recent times that agnosticism has betaken itself to the flattering of science and the singling out of religion as the special object of its hostility.

## BALFOUR'S CRITICISM

The change is only a change of attitude, not a change of nature. Agnosticism is still in reality as little the true friend of science as ever. Modern agnosticism is as inconsistent with science in itself as was ancient agnosticism. The facts which it denies and the principles which it assails are facts and principles essential to the existence and development of science; and if the agnosticism of the present day were more consistent and ingenuous it would openly, like the agnosticism of old, pronounce all science, and not merely religious science, illegitimate and illusory. But, on the contrary, it identifies itself with science, and endeavours to pass off its dogmatic assumptions and illogical negative inferences as, forsooth, "scientific." Its representatives, far from being too sceptical as to the principles, data, methods, and conclusions of science, are not even reasonably cautious and critical. The same persons who will scarcely look at the most conclusive proofs and evidences in favour of religion readily accept as facts and certainties mere hypotheses and conjectures if put forth in the name of science.

Viewed in this connection Mr. Balfour's *Defence of Philosophic Doubt* and *Foundations of Belief* are rare and admirable exceptions to the general tenor of agnostic publications. It is one of the greatest, probably the greatest, of their merits that they proceed on a perfectly clear recognition of the obligation under which the scientific agnostic lies to subject the idea, premisses, logical processes, and internal organisation of science itself to strict scrutiny. But the ordinary representatives of contemporary agnosticism



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are just the persons who have least recognised that this is a merit at all. Mr. Balfour's works have had no influence whatever, so far as I am aware, in the way of inducing our so-called scientific agnostics to be more consistent, comprehensive, and impartial in their epistemological criticism. And this is hardly to be wondered at, seeing that were the agnostics referred to to criticise the foundations of science as they criticise those of religion, Mr. Balfour's contention that the case against religious science is no stronger than against other science could not be plausibly rejected.

The immunity granted by the scientific agnostics to positive science is not due to all sceptical objections to science having been conclusively answered or being capable of being easily answered. Most of them have not been completely answered, and are difficult to answer. They are quite of the same nature as the objections which the scientific agnostics urge as decisive against theistic or Christian faith. Only one of them, perhaps, has lost any considerable measure of its force even against the physical sciences,—the objection drawn from the discordancy of the conclusions reached. In consequence of following appropriate methods the physical sciences have at length attained in a large measure to results which receive the assent of all competent judges. But surely the fact that for so many ages they failed in this respect, and that their failure was the most effective of the sceptical arguments employed against them, ought to make our scientific agnostics more scrupulous than they are in using it against the disciplines or sciences conversant

## CAUSES OF ANTI-RELIGIOUS AGNOSTICISM

with religion. It has become powerless against physical science, why may it not become so likewise against religious science? Why should the latter not learn to follow better methods, and so become entitled to the same sort of immunity as is now enjoyed by the former? May it not even be fairly said to be on the way to attain the same sort of general harmony as regards results which is perceptible in physical science, and that this will be denied only by the prejudiced or ill-informed?

### III. SOME CAUSES OF PREVALENCE OF ANTI-RELIGIOUS AGNOSTICISM

Why is anti-religious or anti-theological agnosticism so prevalent?

No one reason can account for it. Its explanation must be sought for in the co-operant and concurrent action of various causes, as to the influence of which some remarks may not be unnecessary or unprofitable.

I. One such cause, then, although a partial and indirect one, may be found in the comparatively critical temper and scientific spirit of the present age. Let us not exaggerate its influence. Our age is not nearly so critical or scientific as we are apt to suppose. Only a relatively small number among us are either critical or scientific. All but a very few even of educated persons are content to accept on trust what a popular historian of good repute tells them, without any examination of his authorities. Freeman and Stubbs were doubtless critical historians, but even their readers are generally no more critical stu-

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dents of history than were the first generations of readers of Livy, Gregory of Tours, or Bede. Scientific opinion is widely diffused through contemporary society, but were all who participated in it to be subjected to an examination on the elements of science, it would probably be found that a very small proportion of them could be credited with scientific knowledge. On what passes current for literary, political, social, and religious criticism it can hardly be necessary to say even a word to the intelligent. A truly critical and scientific spirit is still confined to minds of exceptional quality or special training. Much that is so ascribed really springs from faith—yea, from a blind, facile, or perverted faith.

Yet there can be no reasonable doubt that the modern spirit is critical and scientific to a degree and an extent which the medieval spirit was not. Some centuries ago there was evoked by causes which it is unnecessary here to indicate a doubting, questioning, scrutinising temper of mind, which soon made its presence felt in various forms. It broke up the long dogmatic slumber of Europe, and impelled men to cast off old beliefs, to assail established authorities, and to follow other routes and devise new methods, in order to attain their ends. Down to this day it has been continually growing in strength. Its history is the main current of modern history. Its course and character have been very largely directed and determined by forces and modes of thought which are not specifically religious, and which may readily become anti-religious. It has shown itself in the region of intellect chiefly in the elaboration and application of

## WANT OF RELIGIOUS SUSCEPTIBILITY

the physical, experimental, positive, inductive sciences, and in the region of action by wonderful ingenuity and energy as regards things secular. It is apt in the one sphere to become empiricism or materialism, and in the other to become worldliness; and those who are carried by it to either error must naturally be disposed to justify themselves by adopting agnostic views and supporting them by what are alleged to be critical methods. The only sort of religious unity which is perceptible to the ordinary eye has been broken by it into fragments. There is no one outstanding religious authority, law, or creed now acknowledged as there was in pre-Reformation days. Religion is at present of all things the most subjected to questionings, and the questions raised regarding it are often of a kind to which the most relevant and conclusive answers are just those which can be least appreciated by irreligious men. Multitudes among us who have no scientific knowledge of any branch of physics would be ashamed to acknowledge their ignorance, but are ready to believe and proud to repeat the metaphysical and anti-theological nonsense in which physicists of a certain type too frequently indulge. Multitudes destitute of critical capacity or training are anxious to adopt what they deem "advanced critical views," and, of course, have a preference for the *most advanced*. Religion does not now engross the thoughts of mankind generally as it did in some former generations; theology has ceased to be the favourite and dominant science; the sciences which deal with things seen and temporal are, on the contrary, those now held in highest honour

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and pursued with the greatest zeal. But obviously the too exclusive cultivation of the physical sciences may be just as anti-religious in tendency, and as favourable to the spread of anti-theological agnosticism, as the too exclusive pursuit of bodily pleasure and material wealth.

II. There is another reason or element which must not be left out of our answer to the question under consideration. Religious knowledge, like every other kind of knowledge, presupposes special qualifications in those who duly appreciate and successfully acquire it. There is no science which does not require special aptitudes in its cultivators. The study of formal logic does not demand purity of heart, but it demands a purity of reason which is in many persons not to be found. Mathematics only discloses its capabilities to those who have an exceptional power of apprehending quantitative relations. Chemical or physiological investigation requires much that is not called for in mathematical investigation. Conscience is an indispensable prerequisite in moral science but not in biology. An individual devoid of susceptibility to the beautiful can be no authority on questions of æsthetics. In like manner, spiritual truth requires for its apprehension and study spiritual discernment. There is nothing exceptional in its not being perceived by unspiritually-minded men even where the evidences of its presence are abundant.

It may be of all truth the clearest in itself, and yet dark and dim to imperfect and untrained organs of vision; the sort of truth for the right discernment of which the natural man most needs aid and discipline.

## OUR SPIRITUAL NATURE

It was just of spiritual as compared with material objects that Aristotle so wisely and aptly said that "our eyes are like those of night-birds for daylight, better fitted to observe those which are less than those which are most visible in themselves."<sup>1</sup> Although the whole nature of man is made for the apprehension and enjoyment of spiritual truth, it nevertheless requires for the attainment of a clear consciousness and sure possession of it an amount of care and effort, of external guidance and self-endeavour, greater than is needed for the comprehension or acquisition of lower and lesser things. Our spiritual nature is far more easily atrophied through carelessness and disuse than our corporeal, sentient, or purely intellectual nature. Hence a scientist, merely through exclusive devotion to his work as a scientist, may become as dead to the evidences and attractions of religious truth as the sensualist. A mere scientist, even although a naturally great and good man, may thus allow the springs of spiritual knowledge and life within him to dry up. The life of Charles Darwin, otherwise so praiseworthy, was in this respect a warning. Although that illustrious man had not only wonderful special gifts as a scientist but was an eminently sincere, self-denying, humble, lovable man, in his all-engrossing pursuit of biological knowledge he lost—and with characteristic candour confessed that he had lost—his power to appreciate art and literature, and to feel the devout emotions with which the sublimities of nature had in his early years inspired

<sup>1</sup> *Metaphysics*, Bk. I. The Less, ch. i.



him.<sup>1</sup> His scientific work has had a vast and, I believe, beneficent influence on religious thought and life, but I am much mistaken if there will be found in any of his writings a single opinion expressed by him on religious questions which can fairly be said to have either originality or much intrinsic value. Most instructive, however, was the contrast between his own modest reluctance to put forth his views on religion and the foolish anxiety of others to ascertain what those views were. No man placed as he was could have given less encouragement to the folly of those who would fain have raised him to the rank of an authority in theology.

Many are alive to the things of time and sense who are dead to things eternal and spiritual. The things, however, to which men are dead they are apt to believe do not exist or cannot be known. And powers of apprehension which men are unconscious of possessing they readily persuade themselves are not real powers. It is impossible for any one to deny that

<sup>1</sup> The words of Darwin referred to are : " I have said that in one respect my mind has changed during the last twenty or thirty years. Up to the age of thirty, or beyond it, poetry of many kinds, such as the works of Milton, Gray, Byron, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley, gave me great pleasure, and, even as a schoolboy, I took immense delight in Shakespeare, especially in the historical plays. I have also said that formerly pictures gave me considerable and music very great delight. But now for many years I cannot endure to read a line of poetry ; I have tried lately to read Shakespeare, and found it so intolerably dull that it nauseated me. I have also lost my taste for pictures or music. My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts, but why this should have caused the atrophy of that part of the brain alone, on which the higher tastes depend, I cannot conceive. The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness, and may possibly be injurious to the intellect, and more probably to the moral character by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature."—*Life*, vol. i. pp. 100–102 ; also *ib.*, pp. 311, 312.

## WANT OF RELIGIOUS SUSCEPTIBILITY

there is mathematical truth, yet Sir William Hamilton's famous attack on mathematics was widely approved among those whose minds, although otherwise well endowed, were without mathematical aptitudes, and consequently predisposed to attribute their want of success in mathematical studies rather to defects in the science than to the limitations of their own understandings. Owing to the prevalent neglect of æsthetic culture there are many agnostics as to æsthetic realities, but there are no true artists among them,—they are all anti-æsthetic agnostics. In morals, a depraved man is naturally sceptical as to goodness, and a thoroughly selfish man cannot believe in pure disinterestedness. It is, in fact, only in conformity with a law coextensive with the nature and history of man that religious truth should need for its acquisition special affinities and peculiar qualifications. The affections of a suitably disposed heart are as necessary for the right apprehension and full appropriation of such truth as the energies of a clear intellect. A personal and progressive experience in which the human soul meets and feels itself in contact and communion with the Divine Spirit is an indispensable condition of a real and satisfying comprehension of the highest and most needed truth. Hence wherever there is a mind in which the germs of natural piety which it brought with it into the world have been allowed to decay and die, on which religious impressions have been slight and evanescent, by which serious and searching religious experiences have been unfelt, and which has come to be wholly engrossed by secular studies and interests, there also

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is a mind to which no creed can be so congenial as that of agnosticism, and of agnosticism in some atheistic form. To such a mind Nature, far from being

. . . "the thin veil  
Which half reveals, and half conceals the face  
And lineaments of our King,"

is a dull dead wall which hides them from view; and Supernatural Revelation may be even less translucent to it. An agnostic of this type should be conscious of his deficiency of sensibility; of his incapacity to realise what others of richer nature and broader culture have assuredly felt; of his unreceptiveness to experiences which have produced the purest and loveliest, the most disinterested and devoted of human lives, and consequently of a certain hardness, narrowness, and barrenness of spirit. Very probably he will not be thus conscious, but he ought, I think, to be so; and if he be so, he can hardly fail to be considerably sceptical of his own scepticism. And well he may. His is an agnosticism which admits of an easy, obvious, and ample explanation from natural causes, apart altogether from rational grounds.

I have not by these observations begged the question at issue. I do not argue that the agnostic ought to accept the religious experiences to which I refer as valid evidences, but merely that without experiences, without a certain familiar and inward realisation of the character, influence, and effects of religion, he cannot be a competent critic or judge of its claims and credentials. I fully admit that no one should accept what presents itself to him as religion

## ANTI-RELIGIOUS FEELINGS

without being satisfied of its rationality and truth. What I maintain is merely that many may and actually do fail to satisfy themselves of the rationality and truth of religion because of a poverty and blindness of spirit for which they are themselves, in great part at least, responsible.

III. The spread of anti-religious agnosticism, I must now indicate, is favoured not only by the want of special qualifications required for the due appreciation of religion, but by the prevalence of feelings and passions directly adverse to its reception. Both in the individual and in society there are an unwillingness and aversion, arising from various causes, to accept the evidences presented by religion and to submit to the claims which it makes. True and pure religion condemns all that is false and impure in human nature, and demands sacrifices and exertions which ordinary human beings are very indisposed to make. It humbles the pride of man by evincing his helplessness as regards the attainment of his highest end. It throws on his sinfulness a searching and terrible light, and imposes on his appetites and passions manifold and severe restraints. It enjoins a law of life opposed to all the ideals which the heart loves to body forth in its imaginations. It requires a loving and unqualified submission in all things to the Divine Will. Hence we cannot reasonably fail to conclude that it must be an utter delusion to suppose that religion, were it only set forth to men in its intrinsic simplicity, truth, and beauty, would be spontaneously and joyously accepted by all. There is that in human nature which makes it possible for men to

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hate religion because of, and in the measure of, its purity and excellence.

Is it said that the evil in man often favours the spread of religion? That must be granted; but it detracts nothing from the truth or relevancy of what is here contended for. It is only true and pure religion which what is false and foul in man cannot promote. A right use of reason, the love of excellence, hatred of vice and contempt of meanness, good and generous affections, unperverted and healthy desires and appetites, alone favour the reception and growth of religion as it ought to be, a self-consistent and undefiled religion. But causes of a contrary nature have unquestionably had an enormous influence on the actual and common belief and practice of the world, and go far to explain the prevalence of religious error and corruption. To show what these causes are and how they operate may often be very useful work,—a fair and effective refutation of the opinions and exposure of the acts to which they have given rise.

Archbishop Whateley's *Errors of Romanism traced to their Origin in Human Nature* has obtained the approval of Protestants of all shades and varieties; and although, of course, Catholics will not accept its conclusions, I imagine that they will not challenge the legitimacy of its method but merely the manner of its application, and will be content to argue that what are alleged to be errors had sources of a different nature than those to which Whateley has referred them,—sources which warrant their being held not to be errors.

## EVIL MAY SPREAD RELIGION

The agnostic rejectors of religion have themselves made great use of the argument that religious beliefs are the products of irrational causes, abnormal affections, diseased tendencies. They are quite entitled to do so, and the argument is both valid and valuable within certain limits. But it is double-edged, and may be employed as legitimately and with as much effect against the agnosticism which rejects religion as against any of the forms of religion which agnosticism impugns. The non-rational causes favourable to irreligion and agnosticism are not less numerous and powerful than those favourable to religion and theology. Prejudices and enmities against religion are so common and so deeply rooted in human nature that the agnosticism which represents it as vain and deceptive must be greatly aided by them, and may in many cases be mainly produced by them. As already indicated, religion, even if it were always true and pure, would naturally be to a large extent the object of hostile feelings. It gains and satisfies many through conforming and ministering to what is foolish and depraved in them. But it in consequence thereof also repels and revolts many, who, instead of thoughtfully distinguishing between the true and the false, the pure and the impure in religion, treat religion as responsible for all that assumes its name. Hence, while some are led by their passions and prejudices to degrade and deprave religion, others are led by observation of the corruptions so brought about to doubt or disbelief of its truth, and to hatred and contempt of it, even when it fully deserves their faith, love, and obedience. A vast amount of the aversion



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to religion from which the atheism and scepticism of our times have sprung may be clearly traced to the false impressions of its real nature occasioned by the corruptions and abuses of it, the evils done or suspected to have been done in its name, and the real or imagined faults of its professors. The atheism and scepticism which have been so prevalent throughout the past century in Britain, France, Germany, and Italy, have largely arisen from a hatred of the Church and clergy, founded on the belief of their aiming chiefly at their own aggrandisement and being inimical to the interests of the poor and labouring classes. In such an association of ideas and feelings there may be little reality or logic, but there is unquestionably much of that human nature which abounds in the average man and so often proves stronger than truth and reason. The usurpations of ecclesiastical ambition, the rash speculations of theologians, the errors and crudities of preachers, the inconsistencies of religionists, &c., have probably done more to make men unbelievers than unimpassioned arguments on behalf of scepticism. And it is not only on the uneducated that influences of the kind referred to have told. Their operation can be almost as plainly traced in Bentham's *Analysis of Natural Religion on the Temporal Happiness of Mankind*, J. S. Mill's *Essay on the Utility of Religion*, Cotter Morison's *Service of Humanity*, and Leslie Stephen's *Agnostic Apology*, as in the speeches reported and articles published in the cheap socialist, secularist, and freethought periodicals.

IV. Perhaps a still deeper and more copious eth-

## A CAUSE OF ANTI-RELIGIOUS AGNOSTICISM

ical source of anti-religious agnosticism than any of the foregoing has now to be indicated. I refer to a misconception of the nature of religion, from which result deplorable neglect and violation of the moral requirements of religious investigation. One must apprehend what religion really is before one can rightly appreciate it. But many so fail in this respect as to approach even the consideration of it in an utterly wrong spirit. They regard the question as to its truth or falsity as only one among the many questions with which they may deal, and consequently a question which may be postponed to any season deemed convenient, and prosecuted just so far and in such ways as is agreeable to them. Some even imagine that the proper frame of spirit in which to approach it is one of cold unconcern, not disturbed by any sense of personal interest in the inquiry to be instituted.

Such a view is extremely foolish. Religion is no mere matter of theory, and the consideration of it is no mere matter of option. It is a practical thing, and one so eminently and comprehensively practical that if true at all it must be of supreme importance. What is highest in man is not knowledge but action. His intelligence is merely a subordinate and instrumental faculty. His chief end is to be found not in thinking but in doing. Human nature, as Butler has well shown, is a constitution framed for virtue under the government of conscience. All its powers, as Kant has so impressively taught, ought to work under the primacy of the moral reason. Duty is its highest and most comprehensive law; the *doing* of

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duty is the noblest improvement of *being*. The first and greatest, yea, in a sense the one, demand made on man is to do whatever he recognises to be duty, and this demand is of the most imperative kind, for whoever refuses to obey it is self-degraded, and unless given over to a reprobate mind, feels himself to be so before God and man.

“ Powers depart,  
Possessions vanish, and opinions change,  
And passions hold a fluctuating seat ;  
But by the storm of circumstance unshaken,  
And subject neither to eclipse nor wane,  
Duty exists : immutably survives  
For our support, the measure and the forms  
Which an abstract intelligence supplies ;  
Whose kingdom is where time and space are not.”

And to Duty all man's work, whether of head or hands, ought to have a constant reference. Our responsibility as men is coextensive with our ability, our free agency, our power of willing. We are as responsible for the exercise and use of our intellectual faculties as of our bodily members, seeing that the former are under our direction and control equally with the latter. The law of duty is for all, yet not the same for all. It assigns to each man his own work and no other's. It calls upon some specially to occupy themselves with science; and to all such it prescribes in what spirit their work must be done—one of earnestness, sincerity, thoroughness, entire truthfulness, disinterestedness, and other kindred qualities. Some it as distinctly forbids to have to do with science, and enjoins to work in other spheres

## MORALITY AND RELIGION

for which they are better fitted and in which they can labour without neglecting the claims of common life. But it exempts none from the obligation to consider seriously what the claims of religion on them are, and how they stand in relation to it, for the law of duty is itself so identified with that obligation and those claims that for it to do so were to deny itself. Morality and religion so support and include each other that they are not separable. The great question, What must I do? How can I live and act as I ought?—the question which of all others has the most direct and imperative claims on every man—is at once a religious and a moral one, so that none are morally free to neglect consideration of the question as to the truth and requirements of religion, or to consider it otherwise than with all the care and earnestness appropriate to a practical matter of primary importance. If there be a God there is one to whom we stand in the most intimate relations, to whom we must be under infinite obligations, and to whose will our lives and actions ought to be conformed. Hence to endeavour to determine whether God be or not, and if He be what He is, and whether and how He has manifested Himself, and how He is related to us, and what He requires of us as the rational and moral beings we are, is a clear and immediate duty which no man may neglect, or perfunctorily discharge, without incurring great guilt and deserving great shame.

But we may well question if there would be any anti-theological agnostics were this duty faithfully performed. Has any soul sought early, earnestly, and in a reasonable way for God without finding

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Him, and acquiring some measure of the kind of knowledge which the anti-theological agnostic declares to be unattainable? Probably not one. And certainly the distinctively sceptical way of dealing with the fundamental questions as to religious truth is a foolish and wrong way. "Scepticism (*ἡ σκέψις*)," says Sextus, "is a faculty or method of inquiry which compares and which opposes in all possible ways apparent or sensible things and those which are perceived by the understanding; one by means of which we arrive, owing to the equal weight of the things or reasons opposed, first to suspension of judgment, and then to exemption from trouble, to tranquillity of soul." Rather, might he have said, a method of producing intellectual and moral paralysis, and so deadness of soul. It has nothing in common with the method of scientific inquiry. And it is much more inapplicable in practical life. We are bound to satisfy ourselves that what seem to be duties are duties; but duties once recognised are not to be neglected or imperfectly performed while we go wandering in all directions in quest of reasons which may counterbalance those that seem to show them to be duties. Truth and duty being once in any measure seen, our chief business in regard to them is to follow them up, to try to know them better, and to realise them as fully as we can in our minds and lives,—not to go on devising and collecting objections to them until we are unable to distinguish them from their opposites, and so can persuade ourselves that we need not trouble ourselves about them. The man who, in presence of the evidence for a God of power, wisdom,

## “THE WILL” TO BELIEVE

and righteousness presented by the physical universe, by the human mind, by the wondrous history of our race, and especially, perhaps, by its religious history, culminating as that does in Christianity, instead of attending to it with serious and impartial mind, goes gathering up such poor and slight objections to it as sceptics have been able to adduce, and tries to persuade himself that their united weight is equal to the mighty sum of the Divine self-manifestation, is greatly to be pitied, but also much to be blamed. His method of procedure is rationally and morally wrong. It is a method which anti-theological agnostics have not infrequently followed.

In connection with the point to which our attention is now directed, the distinction on which Dr. Chalmers loved to expatiate—the distinction between the ethics and the objects of theology—is indubitably real and of the greatest importance. The mere probability that there is a God lays us under the strongest obligation to seek Him with earnestness in every way within our reach. If He may be known it is criminal in us not to know Him. Ignorance of Him may be only less reprehensible than conscious impiety. I refer my readers to Dr. Chalmers' own pages.<sup>1</sup>

### IV. “THE WILL” AND “THE WISH” TO BELIEVE

I have not put forward in the preceding observations any plea for a less careful or strict investigation of the claims of religion than of other things. To have done so would have shown distrust of religion and been wrong in itself. Although belief in re-

<sup>1</sup> See Chalmers' *Natural Theology*, ch. i., ii.



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ligion may be more important than belief in aught else, and although we may not unnaturally desire to believe what promises to be so beneficial to us as pure religion, it does not follow that we should believe it without adequate scrutiny. All religion not self-conscious of falsehood challenges inquiry, and will not object to inquiry being searching provided it be honest.

Professor William James and Mr. Wilfrid Ward have written ingeniously and attractively, the former on "The Will to Believe" and the latter on "The Wish to Believe," and in doing so have emphasised some important truths; but I cannot ascribe as much power or right to "willing" and "wishing" in relation to "belief" as they seem to do. The view taken of "will" by Professor James appears to me to wrap the subject he discusses in a distorting and confusing haze. A "will" virtually identified with our "non-intellectual" or "passional nature" is not real will, not will either in its ordinary or its proper psychological acceptation, and its relationship to belief must be on the whole very different from that of will, properly understood, to belief. Will—volition or conation—has often a great influence on belief, but it never affects it directly. There is no such act of mind possible as willing to believe what does not seem to be true or promise to give pleasure, or, in other words, which seems destitute of any reason or evidence for its being deemed true or good. By willing we can give attention to a subject, study it long and earnestly or only hastily and superficially, and in appropriate or inappropriate ways, but we cannot by

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any exertion of will force ourselves to believe any proposition on any subject beyond what seems to us to be the evidence for it. There is no mere "will to believe"; a merely willed belief is a sham belief, no real belief. Dr. James rightly tells us that religious belief is of supreme importance; that it presents to us a momentous option; that the option is a *forced one*; that scepticism is not avoidance of option but is option of a certain particular kind of risk; and that the agnostic advice to keep the willing nature out of the game is an impossible one, seeing that not to decide is itself to decide, just like deciding yes or no, and attended with the same risks; but the inference which he draws from these important considerations—the inference that we not only lawfully may but must decide in the case of such belief not on intellectual but on passional grounds—is neither true nor relevant. Why must we so decide? Because, says Dr. James, there are cases where genuine options are of such a nature that they cannot be decided on intellectual grounds. He has not shown, however, that there are any such cases. In professing to do so he has even made the mistake, truly extraordinary in so eminent a psychologist, of substituting throughout for *options of belief*, which would alone be relevant, *options of action*, which are utterly irrelevant. Will is essentially action. It only indirectly influences belief. To point to instances where men will to act although the likelihood of their acting successfully be small is not in the least a proof of their acting in these instances on passional, not intellectual, grounds. A man, placed in circumstances where he perceives

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that his chances of being able by self-exertion to escape destruction are only as one to a hundred, has not only reason for the most energetic action but far more reason than one who perceives that his chances of escape are as ninety-nine to a hundred. Certainly willing, as Dr. James says, cannot be kept out of the game of believing, but as certainly it cannot force the mind to believe what presents to it no appearance of evidence. The part which willing has in the game is this: the mind can either will to follow along the paths on which the light of truth shines, and in which alone therefore right belief can be attained, or will to deviate from them, and so wander into regions of darkness and delusion. Through a right use of his will a man may arrive at certitude as to the highest truths his spiritual nature needs, and by the abuse of it he may remain ignorant of them or become a disbeliever in them.

As regards "the wish to believe," it is true that we are, as a rule, easily persuaded to believe what we wish to believe. The wish that anything be true is often father to the thought that that thing is true. The most candid minds cannot avoid desiring that certain beliefs may be found true and others not. And for that they are not to be blamed, seeing that it is inevitable. On the other hand, it is characteristic of all candid minds not to let their wishes, their inclinations, pass with them as reasons for belief, and so unduly to influence their judgments. "The wish to believe," so far from being with a man of good sense and intellectual honesty a reason for believing what he wishes, is a reason for his being specially

## DANGER OF WILLING TO BELIEVE

careful and cautious in his inquiries as to whether what he wishes to believe be really true or not. "If," writes Archbishop Whateley, "a mode of effectual and speedy cure be proposed to a sick man, he cannot but wish that the result of his inquiries concerning it may be a well-founded conviction of the safety and efficacy of the remedy prescribed. It would be no mark of wisdom to be indifferent to the restoration of health, but if his wishes should lead him (as is frequently the case) to put implicit confidence in the remedy without any just grounds for it, he would deservedly be taxed with folly. In like manner, a good man will indeed wish to find the evidence of the Christian religion satisfactory, but will weigh the evidence more carefully on account of the importance of the question." Taking this view, I cannot but think that those who say "believe what you wish," "believe what is in the line of your needs," "believe that life is worth living, and your belief will help create the fact," give imperfect and dangerous advice, and instead of helping to refute the agnostic play into his hands. *Believe in the line of your duties* would be a better advice, but better because duties imply clear and imperative perceptions of reason. A reasoned pessimist cannot be a voluntary optimist. A merely willed belief that "life is worth living," were such belief possible, would not help to create the fact. No belief not inclusive of a sense of resting on truth can produce good.

I should be sorry to exaggerate the influence of such passional and ethical causes of anti-theological agnosticism as those which have now been indicated.

## AGNOSTICISM AS TO GOD

I am quite ready to grant that there are anti-theological agnostics whose agnosticism is not to be referred to their operation; and that they account more directly and extensively for religious indifference and obtuseness than for anti-religious scepticism. Genuine agnostics, even when they relegate religious truth to the region of the unknowable, are never men devoid of curiosity as to religious truth, and seldom men devoid of susceptibility to religious influences. It is pathetic, indeed, to observe how many of them struggle to retain, or cannot forego, the religious sentiments which they have sought to show have no foundation or warrant in reason or fact; how many of them are religious in heart and life in spite of their anti-religious agnosticism of intellect. Passional and ethical causes, however, of the kind indicated, have unquestionably been real and powerful causes of anti-religious agnosticism. Whatever tends to make men unspiritual, worldly, selfish, is favourable to it; all that tends to raise them above unspirituality, worldliness, selfishness, is unfavourable; and the strongest of all agnostic forces—the one great safeguard of humanity against the general or final triumph of an anti-religious agnosticism—is none other than the redemptive power of the Gospel of Christ manifested in the strengthening, purifying, and ennobling of the characters and lives of individuals and nations.

## CHAPTER IX

### AGNOSTICISM AS TO RELIGIOUS BELIEF

ALL questions regarding agnosticism as to religion are connected either with knowledge or belief, and must always be taken into consideration in connection with both. I shall attempt to deal with such agnosticism, in the first place, so far as it is connected with belief.

There are few subjects more worthy of study than belief. The power of belief, true or false, for good or evil, is incalculable. Individual character largely depends on personal belief. History has been mainly just what common belief has made it. So long as men's beliefs as to things were regulated not by evidence but by authority there could be no science. Where there is a servile faith in the heart there cannot be freedom in outward relations. While a people believes itself to have been divinely divided into castes it must be the victim of injustice and oppression; while it believes polygamy to be a divinely authorised institution it cannot reap the fruits of domestic virtue. Truth believed alone makes a people truly enlightened, free, and moral. All the religions of the world have sprung from a few momentous beliefs; and all the civilisations of the world have originated in its religions.

It is especially incumbent on both the philosopher and the theologian to seek to have correct views as to belief.



## AGNOSTICISM AS TO RELIGIOUS BELIEF

### I. THEORIES AS TO BELIEF

The worth of a philosophy, it is now universally recognised, greatly depends on what is commonly called its Epistemology,—its theory of the import, validity, limits, and conditions of knowledge. But a theory of knowledge cannot be worked out apart from a theory of belief. The validity of knowledge and the legitimacy of belief are themes which cannot be rationally disjoined. The question, Within what limits is human knowledge possible? is, if not virtually identical with, certainly inseparable from, the question, What are the limits of legitimate belief? And the question, On what conditions is human knowledge attainable? is, in like manner, if not identical with, certainly inseparable from, the question, What conditions must we conform to in order to be entitled to believe? In a word, a doctrine of knowledge and a doctrine of belief are not so much two distinct doctrines as two sides or aspects of one and the same doctrine,—a doctrine which may be called, with almost equal propriety, either Epistemology or Pisteology.

But religious science, theology, while intimately related to philosophy as a whole, is to no other part of it so intimately related as to that which concerns itself with epistemological or pisteological problems. Every form of theology assumes and implies a doctrine of the limits and conditions of knowledge and belief. If a theologian of the present day show himself unconscious of this fact one may be excused for thinking that he has been born out of due season and

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should surely have lived in some former age of the world. It is a matter of comparative indifference whether a theologian regard his theory of knowledge and belief as an introduction to his system of theology or as a part of it; but it is not a matter of indifference that he should see, and see clearly, that if an introduction it is an indispensable one, and one which should vindicate the method and principles of all his subsequent procedure; and that if a part it is a fundamental part, the very basis on which the whole structure he would rear must stand. Theology can only make good its right even to existence through the refutation of various widespread theories of belief and knowledge.

The theologian requires to have a theory of belief. It is not enough that he should have merely a theory of religious belief, or of specifically Christian belief, such as some theologians have sought to provide. Not enough for this simple reason that religious belief is only a form of belief, and Christian faith only a still more special form of it; and consequently that whatever is either true or false of belief as such must be so likewise of all religious belief and of all Christian faith. However much more there may be in any of the forms of belief than there is in its general nature, there cannot reasonably be attributed to them anything which is inconsistent with that nature. A theologian who opposes to an obnoxious general theory either of belief or cognition a specifically religious or Christian one shows an utter want of perspicacity. Until he has displaced the obnoxious general theory with a satisfactory general one there is no room or standing-ground for his special theory.

## AGNOSTICISM AS TO RELIGIOUS BELIEF

It is not then with exclusively religious belief but with belief itself in relation to religion and to scepticism as regards religion that we have here to concern ourselves.

Belief is, however, an essential element in religion. Wherever there is religion there is at the root of it a belief in what may be called the Divine. All religion is founded on such belief. It may be dissociated from truth and knowledge but not from belief. The multitude of worships in the world represents a corresponding multitude of beliefs. The character of any particular worship is an expression of the belief entertained regarding the object of worship. The lowest religion as well as the highest implies in the minds of those influenced by it some sort of creed which elicits their feelings and determines their actions. Theism is the belief that there is one God, the ever-living Creator of the universe and Father of spirits. Pantheism is the belief in the essential identity and inseparability of God and the universe. Polytheism is the belief in many beings deemed divine by those who worship them. Belief being thus the condition of all religion, and consequently of all theology, a theory or study of belief naturally precedes all theology, all scientific study of religion.

The term belief may be used either in a subjective or an objective sense: either of the mental act, the state of consciousness so-called, or of what is believed, be it a fact or proposition, a person or creed. In N.T. and ecclesiastical Greek the term *πίστις* is similarly ambiguous. For example, throughout the Gospels it is only found in a subjective sense, while

## WHAT BELIEF IS AND IS NOT

in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles it so frequently occurs in an objective sense as to have led some critics to maintain that the preaching of the Apostles was essentially different from that of Christ. So in theological Latin *fides* may mean either *fides quâ creditur* or *fides quæ creditur*. And German theologians in treating of *Glaube* often so arbitrarily interchange, combine, or confuse the two significations of the term as to make their dissertations almost worthless. Therefore let me say that here I am treating of belief only in its primary and alone strictly proper sense—its subjective signification.

Belief is a peculiar state of mind, a kind of conscious experience, which it is not difficult to distinguish from various other states of mind or kinds of conscious experience. It is distinct, for instance, from any particular kind of knowledge, inasmuch as it accompanies every kind of knowledge and extends even far beyond the bounds of knowledge. And yet, as will be shown in due time, it has often been both identified with and opposed to knowledge in various ways preventive of clear and just views of religion.

There is, perhaps, no function of mind so easily distinguishable from belief as imagination. Generally they are separated. Only in exceptional and pathological conditions, as in dreaming, hallucination, and insanity, does imagination become so confused in consciousness with sense, intellection, and feeling, as to draw to itself belief, so that its creations and suggestions seem realities.

From feeling also belief is distinct. Feeling in

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itself—feeling apart from all perception and intellection—is a purely subjective affection, having even no reference to an object. Belief, on the contrary, has always reference to an object. It is always belief of or about something. And we may believe things unrelated to our feelings. Space, time, number, and their properties are objects of belief, and supply the contents of whole systems of belief, without directly exciting any feelings.

Belief is, further, neither desire nor volition. Both desire and volition presuppose belief and often powerfully react on belief, but they are specifically distinct from it in at least one marked respect. Desire and volition alike tend towards an end. A striving towards an end, and therewith some reference to the future, are essential to both. But it is not so with belief; it refers to being or not-being, to being so or being otherwise, and may rest entirely in the present or past.

Belief is a primordial fact of consciousness. The mind brings with it into the world the capacity of believing, just as it brings with it the capacity of feeling. The first acts of consciousness involve it not less than the latest. It is a simple, ultimate, and consequently unanalysable mental state. It cannot be decomposed because it has not been compounded. All attempts to show that belief has grown out of more rudimentary conscious states and may be resolved into more elementary mental constituents may safely be held to have failed.

We are not to infer from belief being thus simple that a comprehensive knowledge of it must be easily

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attainable. Such is certainly not the case. The simple elements of mind, like the simple elements of chemistry, demand from those who would become thoroughly acquainted with them protracted and extensive investigations. A thorough knowledge of any one of them supposes a knowledge of all of them. They enter in different ways and proportions into a multitude of compounds, and how they do so is a very large subject for study. To know fully what belief is we should require to know far more about its connection with thought, feeling, emotion, desire, and volition, and how it contributes to constitute and modify the complex manifestations of mind in the individual and in history, than psychology has yet discovered. The more necessary is it for us, therefore, to treat of it only so far as the end we have in view demands.

Hume was, perhaps, the first agnostic to recognise that he required an agnostic theory of belief. The Greek sceptics and their successors had before Hume clearly seen that they were bound to discredit *beliefs* of all kinds, and they attempted to do so by tracing them to non-rational causes, by representing them as contradictory of one another immediately or in their consequences, and by calling in question their alleged *criteria*, &c. The more they might seem to succeed, however, in these efforts, the more inexplicable they made the very existence of belief to appear, seeing that belief is of its very nature an assumption and assertion of the existence of knowledge and truth. Belief in its essential being is a much more formidable obstacle to a rational acceptance of scepticism



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than anything in the characters of particular beliefs or in the differences of kinds of belief. Hence Hume as a sceptic showed both perspicacity and consistency in seeking for a theory of belief itself, and such a theory as would at once explain and explain away the reference to knowledge and truth which is the most distinctive peculiarity of belief. That was precisely what he attempted to accomplish. Reminding his readers that "belief has never yet been explained by any philosopher," he proceeded to give an explanation of his own,—a thoroughly agnostic one. Beliefs, according to his contention, are distinguished from non-beliefs, from imaginations, not by any real or supposed apprehension of evidence but by vivacity or strength of conceptions or impressions. The liveliness of the former is the sole difference between them and the latter. "We must not be contented with saying that the vividness of the idea produces the belief, we must maintain that they are individually the same." "The belief or assent which always attends the memory and senses is nothing but the vivacity of those perceptions they represent, and this alone distinguishes them from imagination."

The explanation is very unsatisfactory. It proceeds on a manifest ignoring of the real nature of the fact professedly explained. But it is vain to attempt to account for anything by implicitly denying it to be what it is. Belief is found only as belief of what appears to be true; never as anything else. To begin by referring it to mere vivacity and force of conceptions is, consequently, to *refer it to what it never is, in order to infer it not to be what it always*

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*appears to be.* In a word, it is to start by implicitly denying what is distinctive of and essential in belief as a fact of consciousness, with a view to being able explicitly to conclude that the fact is an illusion.

Further, imagination, which is unaccompanied by belief, is often livelier and stronger than memory, which is accompanied by it. The evidences on which we assent to truths or facts often make feebler impressions on us than the objects present only to our phantasies. From the pages of Dickens we get livelier ideas of Sam Weller and Oliver Twist than we get of the Saxon or Swabian monarchs from those of the most critical historians; but we do not on that account believe in the fictitious personages or disbelieve in the historical ones. The impressions received from witnessing a great drama well acted are deep and strong, but they are not beliefs in any sane mature mind. Hume's psychology of belief was hopelessly at fault in confounding the sense of reality which imagination may produce with that which evidence produces. It went far in the way of effacing the line of distinction between history and poetry. Hence, perhaps, we may appropriately close our review of it with the following sonnet of Charles F. Johnson on these twain, "History and Poetry":—

" Three men seem real as living men we know  
The Florentine, whose face, woe-worn and dark,  
Rossetti drew ; the Norman Duke, 'so stark  
Of arm that none but him might draw his bow,'  
And 'gentle Shakespeare,' though enshrouded so  
In his own thought, that some men cannot mark  
The soul his book reveals, as when a lark  
Sings from a cloud, unseen by men below.

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But still more real than these seem other three  
Who never walked on earth ; ‘ Hamlet the Dane ’ ;  
The ‘ noble Moor ’ ; the cruel Scottish thane,  
Ambition’s thrall. How strange that they should be,  
Though nought but figments of the poet’s brain,  
Instinct with life, and yet more real than he.”<sup>1</sup>

James Mill, under the influence of Hume and Hartley, was led to attach to *the association of ideas* an even excessive importance for the explanation of mental phenomena. Among his applications of it was an attempt to improve on Hume’s theory of the genesis of belief. He agreed with Hume in holding that there was no generic distinction between a case of belief and a case of imagination. He did not, however, deem it, like Hume, sufficient to represent them as merely instances of more and less lively impression. He further sought to trace the difference as regards liveliness of impression between cases of belief and cases of mere imagination to a corresponding but deeper difference between them as regards strength of association. The difference in the strength of the association between a case of belief and a case of imagination is, according to him, what ultimately differentiates them from each other. “ To believe a succession or co-existence between two facts is only to have the ideas of the two facts so strongly and closely associated that we cannot help having the one idea when we have the other.” In a word, all kinds of belief may be reduced to cases of indissoluble association.

It was thus that James Mill endeavoured to ac-

<sup>1</sup> *Temple Bar*, vol. 96, No. 382, p. 26.

count for belief; and the attempt, although of a character as agnostic in tendency as Hume's own, was one which it was both natural and legitimate for him to make. It was, however, unsuccessful, as every attempt to trace belief to the inseparable association of ideas cannot fail to be. Perceptions of fact must precede ideas, and perceptions of connections of fact associations of ideas. But belief accompanies all the perceptions of facts and their connections which are needed to account for associations of ideas, and cannot therefore be their effect. Further, one may surely believe one thing or idea before associating two or more. The continuous association of two ideas does not make either of them believed. There may be as much closeness of association where there is no belief as where there is. The ideas of Jupiter and of Juno are at least as closely associated as those of the Emperor and Empress of Germany, yet only the latter two personages are objects of belief.

It must be added that the writers of the associationist school have failed to make out that there is any such inseparable association of ideas as they contend for. There are, indeed, ideas which are inseparably connected—*e.g.*, cause and effect, whole and part, colour and extension. Such ideas are always thought of together and cannot be thought of apart; they are indissolubly conjoined. The associationist, however, does not mean by the inseparable association of ideas merely their indissoluble conjunction, their inseparable connection. He means further that their conjunction is one which *has grown to be in-*

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*dissoluble*; that their connection is one which *association has made to be inseparable*. And there his hypothesis completely breaks down. No associationist has shown that any strictly indissoluble association has grown at all; that any of the ideas which cannot be conceived of as existing apart either ever did exist apart or were ever able to be thought of as existing apart. Wherever there is any evidence of ideas having been connected by a process of association there the ideas are always separable, no matter how frequent and uninterrupted may have been their recurrence. Wherever any two ideas are found to be really inseparably associated they will also be found to have been always so; to have never been even conceivable apart; and, therefore, not to have been connected by association at all. Associationists have not discovered a single case of conjunction undoubtedly produced by association which has become inseparable. It is only necessary truth that links ideas indissolubly together. In a word, the so-called law by which associationists have professed to explain belief is itself wholly unproved.<sup>1</sup>

J. S. Mill recognised that his father's account of the origin of belief was untenable, and that belief must be admitted to be a primordial and unanalysable fact. He further saw that a distinction ignored or obscured by his father and other associationists, the distinction between memory and imagination, was an ultimate one. But he fell into the mistake of

<sup>1</sup> See in *Mind*, vol. 1., art. of the author on "Associationism and the Origin of Moral Ideas."

referring all belief to memory and expectation. He might rather have referred all memory and expectation to belief, as memory is belief in the past and expectation implies belief in the future. Belief, however, has a much wider sphere than both memory and expectation taken together. It does not refer merely to the past and the future. There is belief in immediate present experience. There is belief in necessary or what may be called non-temporal truth. Belief in neither of these forms can be legitimately reduced or referred to memory or expectation. Hence belief as such is neither resolvable nor divisible into memory and expectation.

One of the most eminent of contemporary psychologists, Dr. Bain, has discussed the nature of belief at considerable length, and in a very original and instructive way. I feel unable to accept the general conclusions at which he has arrived. At the same time, I am sensible that but for his inquiry my own views regarding the subject of it would have been less definite than they are, and fully recognise that many of his observations and illustrations have a suggestiveness and value which are independent of his generalisations.

It is only with his general findings as to the nature of belief, however, that I have to do. They may, perhaps, be summed up thus:—

- 1°. Action is the basis of belief.
- 2°. It is also the ultimate criterion of belief.
- 3°. Primitive credulity is a fundamental fact of belief.



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4°. Cognisance of the order of nature is a necessary element in belief. And

5°. The opposite of belief is not disbelief but doubt or uncertainty.

Now, it seems to me that all these propositions are inaccurate, and that the following counter-propositions are true:—

1°. Belief is not based on action but on intellection.

2°. Action or preparedness to act is not a test of belief but only of fidelity to certain kinds of belief.

3°. There is no mental fact answering to what Dr. Bain calls "primitive credulity."

4°. Cognisance of the order of nature is not a necessary element in belief. And

5°. The opposite of belief is neither disbelief nor doubt but the absence of belief.

Let us glance at these antagonistic positions. And, first, as to the basis of belief. Dr. Bain very justly opposes the identification of belief with either knowledge or emotion, and also does good service in making apparent the extent and efficiency of its influence on the whole appetent and energising nature of man. The significance of belief undoubtedly largely depends on the closeness and range of its contact with the emotional and volitional principles of the mind. It owes thereto a vast amount of the power which it exercises in individual life and manifests in history. Yet none the less it is, I think, properly regarded by almost all psychologists as mainly an intellectual phenomenon. Its only immediate and universal antecedent is judgment. Its root is thus in intelligence and not in will in Dr. Bain's sense, and still less in

its ordinary psychological sense. It is not grounded in action. Action implies belief. There is no properly human action possible or conceivable except action based on belief. But this is sufficient to show that action cannot be the basis of belief. It cannot be the foundation of its own foundation. Its real basis is obvious. It is intellection,—true or false judgment, and the processes which lead to true or false judgment.

Secondly, there are the contrary positions as to the criterion or test of belief. According to Dr. Bain, acting or preparedness to act is the criterion. A belief is not a mere notion but a state of mind that *we act or would be likely to act on*. It has always a reference, more or less remote, to action; and that it has such a reference is what entitles it to be termed belief. Now, I admit that all belief may have some sort of reference, direct or indirect, to action; or, at least, that it can be imagined to have some such reference: and further admit that readiness to act is the best test we can have of the sincerity of beliefs which directly demand practical conformity. But I cannot concede more. Readiness to act is clearly no criterion of the truth of belief, for it accompanies false as well as true belief,—sheer fanaticism often even more than the faith which rests wholly on reality. Nor does it differentiate belief from knowledge, seeing that knowledge in common with belief tends to express itself in action. Nor from feeling and desire, the references of which to acting and preparedness to act are as obvious and direct as that of belief. It is, in fact, no criterion of belief as such. Belief

*per se* is just what it is in and for consciousness, and needs no external criterion to distinguish it from other mental facts. It may be quite complete without prompting to or producing action. Mere "head-belief" may be as truly belief as "heart-belief," and yet, instead of originating like the latter good works and virtuous habits, may display itself only in a narrow and obstinate opinionativeness. Where evil passions are strong and will weak there may be a real belief in moral principles yet habitual contravention of them. In the higher spheres of being at least we may not be prepared, or even disposed, to act on what we believe. Preparedness to act is there the test of faith in a person or of fidelity to spiritual truth and moral duty, but not a criterion of belief as such. And, passing to lower ground, a man who intelligently follows a geometrical demonstration cannot fail to believe its conclusion with absolute conviction, and that without any reference to action. Then, belief in past events makes no call for action. Dr. Bain himself admits this, but represents the admission as consistent with acceptance of his theory. He tells us that had he run up against a wall yesterday to keep out of the way of a carriage his reason for calling his conviction of having done so a belief and not a mere notion would be the feeling that "were there any likelihood of being jammed up in that spot again he would not go that way if he could help it." "That feeling," he says, "is quite enough to show that, in believing my memory, I have still a reference to action more or less remote." It does not seem to me to be so, for the feeling would have no existence

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unless deliberately evoked in a way which takes away all relevancy from the reference to action. Can it be doubted that Dr. Bain would trust his memory even if he did not exercise his imagination in the way described? An actual "jamming" of the kind specified is quite enough of itself to produce a belief in its occurrence without any speculation as to a possible future "jamming." The belief in what happened is fully accounted for by the recollection of the actual past experience, without any reference to a similar possible future experience.

Notwithstanding the foregoing objections to Dr. Bain's view of the criterion of belief, I recognise that there is a large measure of truth, and of very important truth, in it. Belief is in countless cases a motive to action, and in such cases action is often the surest, and sometimes the only, evidence of the reality of the belief. The connection between belief and volition, faith and practice, is of the most comprehensive and intimate kind, and the correspondence between them is, as a rule, easily traceable. Where there is a weak and hesitating faith there cannot be a strong and consistent life. A fully assured faith is a mighty power even when divorced from knowledge. But, of course, it is a mightier when conjoined with it. Mere faith can only give strength to act; knowledge alone supplies the truth on which to act; and the world in which we live is one wherein all effort to act on what is untrue must prove to have been wasted energy.

Thirdly, reference has to be made to the "primitive credulity" reckoned by Dr. Bain as a fundamental fact of belief. In taking up this position he

rather strangely follows in the wake of Dr. Reid, who, in order to explain belief in testimony, postulated *two instincts, one of veracity and another of credulity*. What Dr. Bain calls "primitive credulity" is an instinct closely akin to the latter, but of wider range. It is an original inclination to assent to everything without suspicion; an intuitive tendency on the side of every uncontradicted experience; "an initial believing impulse of the mind, which errs on the side of excess, and which, if nothing has happened to check it in a particular case, will be strong enough for anything." I entirely disbelieve in the existence of any such principle. The associationist school has always prided itself on not unduly multiplying "intuitive tendencies"; and, undoubtedly, to postulate such a tendency unnecessarily is a serious mistake. In the present instance the principle postulated appears to be of a quite unphilosophical character. It may seem to explain any and every thing foolish in the opinions and practices of individuals and societies, but only to those who do not understand what explanation is. No opinion or practice is accounted for by merely attributing it to credulity. Clearly primitive credulity cannot explain belief itself. Credulity is excess of belief, and to explain belief by excess of belief would show, not that the philosopher who did so was correct in his explanation, but that his initial believing impulse had lost none of its primitive power. There is no evidence of the existence of a temporary instinct to believe everything in any belief or credulousness with which we are familiar. "We begin by

believing everything; whatever is true." So says Dr. Bain. But, in fact, we begin by believing only a few things, and these very simple and certain things,—states of pleasure and pain, primitive cravings and obtrusive impressions of sense. There is no more credulity in a child's belief of the realities which first affect its conscious life than in a scientist's belief in the results of his investigations. Nature takes charge of our earliest education and lays within us a broad basis of belief in truth before we are brought into contact with falsehood. Even human speech and testimony are, as a rule, true. Not veracity and belief but mendacity and distrust call for special explanation, and they find it in the egoistic and evil motives from which they spring and the deceptions to which these give rise. To refer even belief to any intuitive or instinctive tendency is crude psychology. Of course there is a large amount of credulity and false belief in the world. Until people learn to estimate evidence aright, and acquire a sufficient experience of physical nature and human nature, they must often reason badly and believe erroneously. But no intellectual instinct or intuitive tendency is required to account for that. Savage, or so-called "primitive," man, I must add, cannot fairly be cited to prove "primitive credulity," seeing that suspiciousness as well as credulousness is a general characteristic of him.

Fourthly, Dr. Bain argues that nothing can be set forth as belief which does not implicate, in some way or other, the order, arrangements, and sequences of the universe. Cognisance of the order of nature or



of the course of the world is, he holds, a necessary element in belief. And that also is a view which I do not see my way to accept. Perhaps Dr. Bain himself is not quite consistent in holding it. How is it to be harmonised with the view that primitive credulity is a fundamental fact of belief? The credulousness which is referred to an instinctive believing impulse appears to spring just from the want of the cognisance of nature which is affirmed to be a necessary element in belief. Were such cognisance necessarily an element in belief, could primitive credulity be a fundamental fact in it? Would "the instinctive tendency" and the "necessary element" placed in belief not be conflicting principles, one of which would eject the other? Indeed the view in question seems inconsistent even with the general tenor of any philosophy of an empirical character. Cognisance of the order of nature must surely be only attainable, in accordance with empirical principles, through a gradually acquired acquaintance with the facts and processes of nature. It cannot be given or implied as a necessary element in a primordial mental fact like belief. To refer, as Dr. Bain does, to the order of nature in his theory of belief would thus seem to be an error of the same kind as J. S. Mill's well-known recourse to it in his theory of induction. Further, and apart from all considerations as to philosophic self-consistency, there is a very obvious and strong reason for not regarding cognisance of the order of nature as a necessary element of belief. It itself involves belief, and belief of the most comprehensive kind. It is the cognisance

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of a truth which includes a multitude of general truths, all of which imply a multitude of particular experiences, in every one of which belief is an essential constituent. It is through innumerable particular beliefs that the mind arrives at a conviction of the order of nature. And if cognisance of the order of nature be itself thus attained, it manifestly cannot be a necessary element in belief itself.

It is not to be inferred from the preceding remarks that cognisance of the order of nature is a subject which may be safely neglected in the study of belief. It has manifestly a close and important connection with belief. It is to a large extent a test of the value of beliefs: once attained, it cannot fail to be applied as a criterion of their credibility. So long as there is no clear, steady, and truthful conception of the order of nature men cannot fail to fall in consequence into manifold errors and delusions. The characteristics which distinguish medieval from modern thought, faith, and practice are all more or less traceable to differences in the conceptions of nature predominant in medieval and modern times. No one can readily believe what seems to him inconsistent with his general view of the world.

Fifthly, belief and disbelief are, according to Dr. Bain, as mental attitudes the same, the true opposite of both being doubt. This view, however, I do not require to comment on, having had occasion in a former chapter to maintain that the only opposite to belief is non-belief (the absence of belief), just as the only opposite to knowledge is ignorance (nescience), and that doubt differs from belief and disbelief only in complexity and degree.

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## II. THE SPHERE OF BELIEF

The most distinctive characteristic of belief is that it relates in all its forms and degrees to truth and knowledge. These are what it is concerned with, and it assumes that truth is, and that knowledge is more or less attained or attainable. Whatever we believe we believe to be true, and to be known by us, in the measure of our belief of it, as true. Whatever we disbelieve we believe not to be true, and that we know it, in the measure of our disbelief of it, not to be true. Whenever we doubt, it is in the belief that our knowledge is insufficient to warrant a firm conviction either as to the truth or the falsity of what we doubt. This distinctive trait of belief entitles us to regard disbelief and doubt as forms of belief, and to include them under the term belief when we require to employ it in its widest or generic sense.

It should also determine the place and function to be assigned to belief among mental phenomena. It shows that it properly belongs to the intellect as distinguished from feeling or sentiment and from will or conation; and in the intellect to judgment as distinguished from conception and imagination. Men often believe error, but only when they judge that they have reason to believe it to be truth. Belief has always judgment for its antecedent and foundation. Judgment is just the intellect exercised about knowledge and truth; and belief is just acquiescence in the results of its activity. There is nothing in intelligence more essential than judgment thus un-

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derstood, for through it, or rather in the form of it, and of it only, is the mind capable of apprehending, or even supposing that it apprehends, either reality or relationship. It is present in all self-consciousness, in all perceptions of sense, in all intuitions and inferences, in all analysis and in all synthesis, in all estimates of probability and in all convictions of certainty; and wherever judgment thus understood is, there belief also is.

The sphere of belief corresponds to the nature of belief. Hence belief is co-extensive with true and erroneous judgment, with real and imagined knowledge. Whatever a man judges to be true he also believes to be true. But belief is as inseparable from false as from true judgment. The difference between a true and a false judgment is not that the former is and the latter is not believed, but that the former is believed to be what it really is, namely, true, while the latter is believed to be true although really false. Wherever there is error there is belief. Further, belief is necessarily co-extensive with real and imagined knowledge, as both of these are composed of judgments. Whatever any man knows he believes; and there is neither separation nor conflict possible between his knowledge and the belief which accompanies it. The terms know and believe are often indeed opposed. Certain things are said to be *not merely believed but known*, and others to be *not known but only believed*. In all such cases, however, *know implies full assurance*, and *believe denotes more or less of dubiety*. Of course, belief extends far beyond the limits of knowledge. It includes a great

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deal that is false, and there is no false knowledge; there is only "knowledge falsely so called," what is erroneously believed to be knowledge.

What has been said may suffice to indicate the actual sphere of belief. It also suggests what is its proper or legitimate sphere. *Belief should be co-extensive with knowledge, coincident with truth.* Actually it is far more extensive than knowledge, and coincides largely with error and not with truth. But so far as it does so it is a defect or malady of mind. To believe a lie or illusion is an evil and misfortune. The worth of belief depends mainly on the truth and value of its content, on the reality and excellency of its objects. Belief is assent to what is regarded as true, and can have no rightful place in the mind unless true. Faith is from its very nature bound to give reasons for its existence, and, of course, its reasons ought to be good. The entire province of belief belongs of right to the realm of truth. Hence a most important part of the self-discipline incumbent on men is that of endeavouring to conform all their beliefs, disbeliefs, and doubts to the findings of sound judgment; of striving after a complete reasonableness of faith as well as of conduct; of having constant regard in the formation of their convictions to all available and appropriate evidence. It is wrong to believe without evidence, or without due consideration of the amount and weight of evidence, and still worse to believe against evidence. A rightly regulated mind is one in which evidence is the measure of assent; or, in

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other words, in which assent is proportional to evidence.

This truth is of immense practical moment. President Thornwell did not in the least exaggerate, I think, when he wrote thus: "There is no principle which needs to be more strenuously inculcated, than that evidence alone should be the measure of assent. In reference to this principle, the whole discipline of the understanding must be conducted. Our anxiety should be to guard against all the influences which preclude the access of evidence, incapacitate us to appreciate its value, and give false measures of judgment, instead of the natural and legitimate limits of belief. All real evidence we are bound to receive, according to the weight which it would have, in a sound and healthful condition of soul."<sup>1</sup> The truth thus inculcated by the eminent American divine is substantially identical with the principle, "as much ethical as intellectual," which Prof. Huxley held to be "all that is essential to agnosticism,"—the principle "that it is wrong for a man to say he is certain of the objective truth of any proposition unless he can produce evidence which logically justifies that certainty."<sup>2</sup> Clifford has fervently argued for the same principle in his articles on *The Ethics of Belief* and *The Ethics of Religion*,<sup>3</sup> and also under the illusion of its being distinctively agnostic. In reality agnosticism has not the least claim to any peculiar or exclusive right to it. The principle in question is simply the principle of intellectual honesty. It is observed

<sup>1</sup> *Discourses on Truth*, p. 123. Carter, New York, 1855.

<sup>2</sup> *Collected Essays*, vol. v. p. 310 ff. <sup>3</sup> *Lectures and Essays*.



in the ordinary affairs of life just in proportion to the good sense and fair-mindedness of those who conduct them; has been exemplified in all successful historical and scientific research; and ought equally to be conformed to in religious life and inquiry. Christianity assumed and enjoined it from the first, and long before it received recognition as the fundamental condition of true scientific method. It may be that it is now more faithfully and fully acted on in modern positive science than elsewhere. If so, such science may fairly claim to be in that respect exceptionally Christian, but should, most certainly, not pretend to be thereby distinguished from or opposed to Christianity.

Nothing, then, is to be received as true without sufficient evidence. The great and all-comprehensive duty of man as to belief is to believe and disbelieve according to evidence, and neither to believe nor disbelieve when evidence fails him. As Clifford says, "It is wrong in all cases to believe on insufficient evidence; and where it is presumption to doubt and investigate, then it is worse than presumption to believe."<sup>1</sup>

When we say so, however, what are we to understand by "sufficient evidence"? Obviously not only evidence which will produce or warrant an absolute or metaphysical certainty. Such evidence if attainable would, indeed, be amply sufficient, but it is rarely, if ever, attainable. It is possible to raise a theoretical doubt as to any truth. Clifford himself has shown us how we may question the assumptions of Euclidean

<sup>1</sup> *Lectures, &c.*, vol. ii. p. 211.

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geometry and the universal statements of arithmetic. Seemingly only omniscience can be infallible as to anything.

Nor need sufficient evidence be scientific evidence. The statement of Clifford just quoted has been represented as equivalent to the assertion that "no man ought to believe in the doctrine of universal gravitation till he has read carefully through the '*Principia*,' and mastered the steps of the demonstration."<sup>1</sup> Of course, it does not mean anything so absurd. Clifford clearly explained that it was not so meant, and that in many cases we are fully justified in believing even scientific truths on authority. Enough of evidence may be presented in twenty pages of an elementary text-book of physics to enable a schoolboy, quite incapable of understanding the "*Principia*," intelligently to apprehend and accept Newton's law. And still less evidence may be sufficient to warrant such faith in it as is possessed by multitudes who have never been taught even the simplest rudiments of physics. Parents who conscientiously tell their children as true only what they themselves really know to be true may reasonably expect to be believed on their mere word, for in that case their word is, as a rule, a sufficient reason for belief, and the acceptance of it an intellectual and moral benefit.

When scientific knowledge is needed the common man must be content to be guided by scientific experts. In ordinary affairs scientific evidence is rarely to be had, and we must depend on such evidence as is available. And that may be neither very good nor

<sup>1</sup> P. Strutt, *The Nature of Faith*, p. 46.

very abundant. We are often bound to act on slight and weak evidence. To beings with our limited capacities probability, as Butler says, is "the very guide of life." Hence we must beware of despising any kind of evidence which is good, and must willingly accept all evidence to the whole extent that it is good. The best measure of a man's love of truth is to be found in the extent of his anxiety to appreciate aright even the lowest degrees of evidence.

Evidence which leaves us quite uncertain as to whether or not our action will be successful may be amply sufficient to show us that action is the part of wisdom and of duty. We are often morally and prudentially bound to act where the chances of failure far exceed those of achievement. But no cases of this kind can be rationally regarded as exceptions to the law that belief, and action on belief, ought to be in accordance with reason and evidence. That law requires a preponderance of reason in favour of action as against inaction, but not a preponderance of chances of success over chances of failure in action. The bare possibility of success may be a sufficient reason for the most strenuous and painful exertion, when the probability of success is infinitesimally small and failure seems almost inevitable.

Manifestly also we have no right in any case to determine whether the evidence adduced for belief be sufficient or not without an actual examination of it with reference to the conditions and peculiarities of the case in question; no right to prejudge any kind of evidence in an *a priori* manner, or to excuse ourselves from taking it fully and fairly into account on

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a merely general plea that it is insufficient. Every such plea itself needs proof, and can only be proven through a conscientious weighing and sifting of the very evidence on which suspicion or condemnation is prematurely and unfairly cast. This is a rule without exception, and disregard of it necessarily implies more or less of intellectual dishonesty. Probably it is one nowhere so frequently disregarded as in the sphere of religion. The tendencies leading men, instead of carefully endeavouring to determine the real value of what presents itself as evidence, hastily to assume and assert it to be insufficient are there often especially strong. On the other hand, it must be admitted that nowhere else is insufficient evidence more apt to be rashly pronounced ample and conclusive.

We hold, then, that man is never free to believe against evidence, or without evidence, or otherwise than with due regard to the quality, weight, and relevancy of evidence. And yet we reject any merely evidentialist or intellectualist theory of the origin or nature of belief. Belief obviously owes its peculiar character, as well as its peculiar power and importance, largely to its central position in human nature and its intimate affinities with all that is constitutive of that nature. It connects the intellectual, emotional, and volitional capabilities and attributes of the spirit by firmer and subtler ties than any other mental state or condition. It is so conjoined, not only with perception, judgment, and reasoning, but also with imagination, feeling, desire, and will, in their multifarious phases and expressions, as to be influenced by all and operative in and through all. Hence

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every man is very much what his belief is, and his belief very much what he is. And yet there is in this, as we shall afterwards see, nothing inconsistent with evidence being the legitimate rule or criterion of belief.

Nor does the reasonableness of the conformity of belief to evidence imply that belief, and the life of feeling and action founded on belief, should be affected *merely by the strength and clearness of the apprehension of evidence*. They naturally will, and even manifestly ought, to be affected also by the *character of the object or content of belief*. All belief is not the same belief nor of the same value. Many true and attainable beliefs are not worth our seeking after, or troubling ourselves as to what evidence there may be for them. Beliefs as to morals have claims upon us which beliefs as to lower concerns have not, and demand from us more anxious inquiry as to whether they are true or false. Belief in God should naturally so affect a man's whole view of the world and history, and so influence his whole life and conduct, and has also such immense significance for societies and nations, that a refusal to study the grounds of it with the utmost care and earnestness can only be regarded as inexcusable.

### III. CHRISTIAN FAITH IN RELATION TO BELIEF

Inasmuch as religious belief is a kind of belief and Christian faith a form of religious belief, all that has been affirmed of belief in the foregoing observations must, if true at all, hold good of religious belief and of Christian faith. All that is true of the universal

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(belief) must be true of the special (religious belief) and of the particular (Christian faith). Hence since all belief ought to rest on evidence, and can only justify its existence by reasons, religious belief is bound so to justify itself, and Christian faith is under the same obligation.

But the converse does not hold good. Religious belief is not mere belief: it has a distinctive character of its own, and the reasons which justify it must be of a special kind and appropriate to its nature,—not the reasons for any sort of non-religious belief. As a religious phenomenon it must have a religious explanation; as a spiritual fact it must be grounded on spiritual truth. To demand of it to produce mathematical, physical, or historical reasons, or to submit to be tested by mathematical, physical, or historical criteria, would be absurd.

Not otherwise is it with regard to Christian faith. That implies still more that is not to be found in mere belief than does simple religious belief. It is not mere belief, nor mere belief in religious truth, nor even mere belief in Christian truth. It is a self-surrendering acceptance of Christ as of God made wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption unto us; a supreme trust in Christ based on a distinctive conviction as to His character and His relationship alike to God and man. Mere belief is, indeed, sometimes spoken of in the New Testament by the same name as faith, but it is always in such cases so spoken of as to indicate that it is not the faith which the Gospel demands but a dead and unprofitable faith, such as even the most wicked of beings may



have. Faith in its distinctively Christian sense implies the action of all the fundamental powers and affections of the human spirit. It contains in germ the whole Christian life, being a turning away from darkness to light, from sin to righteousness, from self to God manifested in and through Christ.

Christian faith when true to its proper nature is religious belief at its highest and best: the final and perfect form of belief. All religion presupposes and proceeds from belief. In the ruder forms of religion, however, belief is, for the most part, capricious and gregarious, unreflecting and unquestioning. No express demand for it is needed, as no one thinks of testing current beliefs by private judgment. When such a demand for it is made, religious doubt or disbelief has already arisen. It is only in religions which find themselves suspected or opposed, and feel the need of overcoming distrust and antagonism, that stress is laid on belief and reasons for it urged. Brahmanism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and Mohammedanism are examples of ethnic religions of this kind. In the Vedic hymns, the Epic poems, the Puranas, the Tantras, &c., of Hinduism faith is highly lauded. It is explicitly appealed to and enjoined in various connections, yet rarely, if ever, in a truly reasonable way; and nowhere has the doctrine of "justification by faith" been so monstrously perverted to immoral ends as in Hinduism. Buddhism has often been described as not taking faith into account at all; but that is an incorrect account. What is true is that in Buddhism faith is not regarded as a separate principle but identified with knowledge, so that right beliefs

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are merely correct views. Original Buddhism was essentially an ethical rationalism incapable of laying hold of the ordinary human heart. It had almost nothing in common with popular Buddhism, in which faith shows itself as almost entirely divorced from rational and moral law, and in most extravagant and degrading practices. Zoroastrianism, dualistic although it was, did more justice to faith than either Brahmanism or Buddhism, but as dualistic it could not possibly do full justice to it. A true monotheism can alone elicit all the powers of a complete faith. Mohammedanism was a direct creation of faith and a marvellous exemplification of its might. The whole Mohammedan world may justly be said to rest on confidence in the divine mission of its founder. The extraordinary rapidity with which Mohammedanism spread was chiefly due, indeed, to its free and unsparing use of the sword; but it was faith which seized and yielded the sword. Mohammedan like Zoroastrian faith is not mere belief, mere assent, or mere conformity of conviction with reality, but inclusive of the central energies of the spirit. It is required to produce appropriate fruits, possess the whole heart, and regulate the whole life. It is "the entire surrender of the will to God" (Islâm), and "those who have surrendered themselves" (Mussulmen) are "the believers" as opposed to "the rejectors" (Kaf-firs). But it implies a very defective conception of God,—an idea of Him in which righteousness and love are sacrificed to power and authority. Hence it is not truly and fully moral; not the surrender of enlightened, free, and affectionate service of absolute

goodness, but of servile submission to arbitrary omnipotence. Hence, admirable although Mohammedan faith be in certain respects, it can by no means satisfy the intellectual, emotional, or moral requirements of man, and is far from rightly related to evidence, or affection, or duty.

The term "faith" hardly occurs in the Old Testament. Yet its importance as a condition of piety is much more adequately recognised there than in the Koran, although for the most part rather implicitly than explicitly, rather through historical examples than doctrinal statements. The faith which animates the Christian is, as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews has so strikingly shown, substantially the same principle as that through which the patriarchs and prophets, saints and heroes, of the ancient dispensation gained their spiritual victories and secured the Divine approval. But what is merely implied and latent in the Old Testament is clearly expressed and definitely evolved in the New. In Christianity alone has faith had its proper nature and significance as a religious principle fully disclosed. Its predominant form is no longer, as under the old dispensation, *the fear of the Lord*, but *trust in a Heavenly Father*. It retains the awe and reverence but none of the servile fear of the ancient faith; it works especially by love, moves the whole nature, and aims at moral perfection, likeness to Christ, its distinctive object.

Christian faith is, therefore, far more than mere belief, or even mere religious belief, and much which is true of it is true only of itself. Yet it is belief, and

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belief of a distinctively religious kind, and what is true of that belief is true of it. Like all other belief it ought to be in accordance with reason and conformed to evidence; ought to be preceded by adequate consideration and rest on sane judgment. The justice of this requirement is everywhere presupposed and often and clearly expressed in the Christian Scriptures. A blind faith is not a Christian faith. The latter is essentially a turning in mind, heart, and will from darkness to light,—the seeking and following of light. And accordingly it claims to be warranted by abundant evidence, and, alike as conviction and as self-surrender, has reasons which it is not afraid to present as conclusive. It neither sanctions nor allows of any divorce between itself and the enlightened understanding. One of its most prominent and distinctive characteristics is its continuous and comprehensive appeal to evidence. Yet it is no mere belief or simple historical faith, but a supreme trust or reliance based on the self-revelation of God which centres in Christ. Christian faith is a unique self-surrendering acceptance of Christ as made of God unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Sometimes, indeed, mere belief is spoken of in the New Testament by the same name as faith, but it is then always sufficiently indicated to be not the faith which the Gospel demands, but a dead faith, an unprofitable faith, a faith which the most wicked may have. Faith in its distinctively Christian sense implies the action of all the fundamental powers and affections of the human spirit; can have no being without love and good works; and contains in germ

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the whole Christian life, being a turning away from darkness to light, from sin to righteousness, from self to God.

### IV. WHY BELIEF AS TO RELIGION IS SO OFTEN FALSE

Many questions connected with belief might be relevantly treated of in relation to agnosticism, but my space allows me to deal in this chapter with only one—viz., the question, What is involved in the fact that belief is to so great an extent, as it obviously is, false? In dealing with it I shall have regard specially to religious belief, although all other belief is liable to be more or less vitiated in the same way.

It is unnecessary to spend time in proving the fact from which we are to start. The slightest survey of the systems of belief which rule the world is sufficient to show that they are largely self-contradictory, inconsistent with one another, insufficiently supported by evidence, and irreconcilable with the dictates of enlightened reason and conscience. It is especially manifest that there is an enormous, depressing, perplexing amount of false religious belief in the world. About 230 millions of human creatures, or 16 per cent. of mankind, are reckoned still to adhere to religions in which only savages can believe, and which so long as they are believed in must keep their votaries savages. Several hundreds of millions of our race are vaguely termed Brahminists or Buddhists. The believers in Mohammed are probably not less than 120 millions. Israelites may be set down as about 8 millions. Christians are estimated as about 430

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millions, of which over 210 millions are Roman Catholics, over 120 millions Protestants, over 80 millions adherents of the Greek Church, and some 10 millions belong to various comparatively small sects. The number of disbelievers in the existence of any religious truth cannot be even approximately estimated, but must be large. All that implies an enormous extent and amount of false belief of a very serious kind. If any of the systems referred to be even in the main true, all the others must be in a great measure false. The differences between even Roman Catholicism and Protestantism cannot reasonably be deemed of slight importance. If the Pope be infallible, if transubstantiation be true, if out of communion with the Church of Rome there is no salvation, Protestants and all non-Catholics must be most seriously in error; if those propositions are not true, all Catholics must be as seriously in error.

Belief as to religion, then, is to a vast extent false. Why is it so? How are we to account for a fact at once so undeniable and so perplexing? It is not particularly difficult to account for, owing to the development of belief being a strictly historical phenomenon produced by forces which can all be studied in operation by attentive observers. Its explanation is in general terms just this:—Belief is produced and modified by a great variety of causes, many of which are not valid reasons for belief. Belief should be always in conformity with knowledge, but other things than knowledge—authority, self-interest, passion, eloquence, flattery, association, imagination, prejudices of all kinds—often give rise to belief, and so be-



belief is often contrary to knowledge. Belief can only justify itself by evidence, but it frequently owes its origin to quite other causes, and can give no proper justification of itself. Good reasons for belief ought to be the causes of belief, but the real causes of belief are in many cases not good reasons for it. The rational grounds of belief must not be confounded with its actual causes.

The causes which mould and modify man's beliefs are not only numerous but vary in the measure and mode of their influence according to their relations to one another, and especially according to the mental condition of those on whom they act. They often determine belief, but they do not always or necessarily determine it. They produce and modify it in certain circumstances when they would not do so in other circumstances. They make certain persons believe so and so, but would have no such effect on others. They influence injuriously the ignorant, say, but not the cultured, the fanciful but not the intelligent, the prejudiced but not the unprejudiced, and so on. The less experienced, morally refined, and intellectually cultured a people is, the more easily are its beliefs affected by causes which are not reasons, or are inadequate reasons.

The following are some of the chief causes which so act upon belief, and especially upon religious belief, as to account for its being largely false:—

(a) The most general glance over the religions of the world is enough to show that the beliefs of men have been largely affected by their surroundings—by the powers and aspects of nature, geographical condi-

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tions, local peculiarities, &c. Causes of this kind have had an exaggerated influence attributed to them by various writers, yet there can be no reasonable doubt that they have had a very real influence,—some direct influence and a very great amount of indirect influence. The faiths of the world still reflect more or less the features of the skies under which and of the lands on which they arose.

(*b*) The genius and dispositions of the various races and communities of men equally affect the character of their beliefs. Racial, tribal, and national peculiarities are not indeed original causes of divergent religious convictions. They have themselves been produced; but once formed they are real causes, and persistent causes. The different races and families of mankind, where polytheists, have gods which differ very much as they themselves do. Even when various peoples acknowledge one and the same religion, that religion is modified in its beliefs as in its institutions by each of them in conformity with their own genius. It has been thus with Buddhism; thus with Moham-  
medanism; thus with Christianity.

(*c*) The social medium has an immense influence on belief. Belief is a highly contagious thing. In certain states of society, in certain dispositions of the mind of a community, belief spreads with very little aid from reason, with scarcely more than the semblance of an appeal to reason; spreads almost entirely through fellow-feeling, sympathy, emotional excitement, example, imitation, fashion; and hence seizes and subjugates minds almost as quickly, and almost as independently of rational reflection, as the epidem-

ies which from time to time lay hold of and master our bodies.

(*d*) The influence of the social medium in the determination of belief may be explained to a large extent by the power of the association of ideas and by the habits of thought which it generates. And these also of themselves greatly affect belief. Opinions may be easily formed in various ways without good reason, but once formed in any way they are very difficult to be dispelled by the most cogent reasons. The beliefs formed in early youth, for example, although resting it may be on the weakest grounds and the most illusory impressions, are apt to become, simply in virtue of priority of possession and length of tenure, principles which we deem too certain to require testing, too sacred to run any risk of unsettling, and by which we judge of all views and reasonings afterwards submitted to us. *Ponere difficile est quæ placuere diu.*

(*e*) Authority has been another great factor in the development of belief. Outside of Christendom millions believe not because they think themselves to apprehend the truth of what they accept as divine verities, but because they deem themselves bound to believe whatever Confucius, Gotama, or Mohammed have taught. Within Christendom millions in like manner accept as Christian truth not that which commends itself of itself to them as true, but that which they believe to be taught as such by an infallible authority.

(*f*) Belief in general, and religious belief in particular, are likewise strongly affected by the feelings,

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emotions, and desires. It is not true, as some have maintained, that fear alone made the gods; but fear had much to do with the making of them, or there would not have been either so many gods of terror, or even so many terribly erroneous representations of the true God. Nor are man's gods, as others have held, merely projections of his own desires; but his desires account for many of his beliefs regarding his gods. Sensuous passion, for instance, has had a large and deplorable place in history; and it has held a correspondingly large and deplorable place in mythology. There is no feeling, no appetite, no emotion of the human heart which may not, which does not, so stimulate imagination, and so act on the judgment, as to contribute to the formation and character of its religious conceptions and convictions.

(g) Imagination has likewise had a potent influence in the development of religious belief. When properly conjoined and incorporated with reason, when conformed to and regulated by reason, it gives support and energy, strength and wings, to reason in the sphere of religion not less than in the spheres of science and practical life. But imagination is very apt to be disjoined and divorced from reason; to refuse its control and guidance; to have little or no regard to probability or truth; and then in the spiritual as in other spheres it becomes the active and too successful enemy of reason, a source of manifold errors and faults, and, as Lord Bacon calls it, "a troublesome, meddlesome, impertinent faculty."

(h) Religious belief has further been affected by

individual experiences and historical events. A simple-minded Catholic peasant when in difficulty or distress invokes, say, the aid of some popular saint, relief follows, and thenceforth his belief in the power of that saint cannot be shaken by argument because he imagines it to have been confirmed by experience. An educated Protestant will very likely feel amazed at such a lack of logic, and yet, if a proud and selfish man, he may very possibly, when afflictions befall himself, see in them sure indications that there is no providential government of the world. Assur, it would seem, became the chief god of Assyria simply because of the personal preference for him of a warrior king who gained numerous and decisive victories. Mohammedans hold that no true prophet is unsuccessful, and accordingly ask from the claimant to a Divine mission little more in the way of evidence than that he should succeed. Hence there have been so many Mahdis, and hence the desirableness in the interests of truth of Mahdis being "smashed" as quickly as possible.

(i) Of causes of the kind to which I have been referring the last I shall mention is, I believe, the strongest of all—the self, the personality. The main cause of erroneous belief is, I am convinced, want of earnestness, honesty, and goodness in man's own essential nature and activity. That there are many innocent and inevitable errors is not to be doubted; but neither is it to be doubted that for most of their erroneous beliefs, and especially for many of those which most practically and directly concern them, men are themselves seriously to blame. Cen-

## SCEPTICAL INFLUENCE ERRONEOUS

tral light is what they above all need to dispel their circumferential darkness.

“ He that has light within his own dear breast,  
May sit in the centre and enjoy bright day ;  
But he that hides a dark soul and foul thoughts,  
Benighted walks under the midday beam—  
Himself is his own dungeon.”

### V. THE SCEPTICAL INFERENCE FROM PREVALENCE OF FALSE RELIGIOUS BELIEF ERRONEOUS

False religious belief, then, is lamentably prevalent, and its prevalence can be naturally and easily accounted for by the action of causes of belief which are not reasons for belief. As such causes are numerous and powerful, the quantity of irrational belief in the world is enormous. Does it follow that we can legitimately draw from those two facts, the one of which is the explanation of the other, the sceptical or agnostic inferences which have so often been deduced from them? My answer is in the negative.

Hume, I have said, was perhaps the first to draw the distinction between reasons and causes of belief in a way really serviceable to the historical study of religion. But from the very dawn of religious scepticism in India and in Greece the distinction was so far perceived as to be employed to discredit religious belief. Scepticism has always pointed to the multiplicity and contrariety of religions, and to the way in which they have arisen, as an argument for rejecting them. Hume himself strove to show that the chief causes of religion had not been reasons which intelligent men would think of giving as a justification for



religion, but the desires and passions of men whose intelligence was dormant, biassed, and untrustworthy; and he did this in such a way as to suggest that it had no proper justification. It still is the habitual practice of sceptics to dwell on the contrariety and absurdity of a vast number of religions: to show how naturally they are explicable by the working of non-rational causes; and then to infer that there is no truth in religious belief; that religious belief is essentially irrational belief; and that man has not been made for the attainment of religious truth. Now, I deny that either the fact of the prevalence of false religious belief, or what I admit to be the correct explanation of it, warrants these or such-like inferences.

One reason for the denial is that the argument employed by scepticism has as much relevancy and force against the kind of doubt and unbelief which it seeks to inculcate as against the faith which it would fain discredit as credulity. It applies to scepticism itself not less than to what it calls dogmatism. Non-rational causes may, and do, generate scepticism as well as dogmatism. Disbelief and doubt have no more right to assume that they are founded on reason and evidence than belief and faith. Belief, disbelief, and doubt are in the same predicament, and the argument cannot fairly be urged only against one of them—belief, *i.e.*, affirmative or positive belief. Make a study of, say, Montaigne, Bayle, and Hume on the one hand, and of Augustine, Calvin, and Samuel Rutherford on the other, with a view to determine how far their opinions were due to their cir-

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cumstances, the character of the times in which they lived, their temperaments, their mental and moral peculiarities, their experiences, and the like, and how far to reason and evidence, and, if the investigation be thorough and impartial, it will be found that the sceptical creeds of the first three mentioned may be just as plausibly, and just as truly, referred to non-rational causes as the dogmatic creeds of the last three mentioned.

Another reason for denial of the sceptical inferences under consideration is the excess of generalisation involved in the sceptical argumentation. The prevalence of false religious belief is certainly not a proof of the non-existence of true religious belief. If in all systems of religion erroneous beliefs can be easily detected, it does not follow that they contain only such beliefs. Because religious belief has been to a great extent produced by causes which are not reasons, we are not entitled to conclude that all religious belief is irrational. To justify that inference we should require to show that religious belief has been *wholly* due to causes which are not reasons. That, however, cannot be done. The argument assumes to be universal what is only general. There are not only causes of religious belief which are not reasons for it, but there are likewise reasons for it which are also causes for it. All true reasons for it have always been among the causes of it. All apprehensions which the human spirit has obtained of the Eternal, and all the modes of the Eternal's self-manifestation to the human spirit, have always been at once reasons and causes of religious faith.

It follows from what has now been stated that another ground for rejection of the sceptical inferences referred to is that the distinction between reasons and causes of belief on which their justification is rested is far from a distinct or definite one. It is, indeed, much the reverse. It is fluctuating and vague, crossed and confused. Whether Hume was in any measure aware of this or not we, perhaps, cannot know. It certainly would not at all have suited his purpose to show that he was aware of it. But it is somewhat remarkable and altogether regrettable that Mr. Arthur Balfour should not have more clearly seen the real character of Hume's distinction. The greater part of what seems to me erroneous in thought and misleading in expression, both in his *Philosophic Doubt* and *Foundations of Belief*, springs, I think, from a too hasty and trusting acceptance of the dictum of our Scottish arch-sceptic.

"There is no distinction," says Mr. Balfour in *Philosophic Doubt*,<sup>1</sup> "which has to be kept more steadily in view than this between the causes or antecedents which produce a belief, and the grounds or reasons which justify one. The inquiry into the first is psychological, the inquiry into the second is philosophical, and they belong therefore . . . to entirely distinct departments of knowledge." Those words, it seems to me, require to be supplemented and corrected by the statement that there is a truth on the subject which ought to be kept just as steadily in view; and that it is this,—the direct causes, the immediate antecedents, of belief are al-

<sup>1</sup> P. 5.

ways at least supposed grounds or reasons, and all true grounds or reasons of belief are also among the causes and antecedents of belief. If that be so, however, the inquiries into causes and grounds, antecedents and reasons, cannot be so distinct as Mr. Balfour represents them to be.

I say the direct causes, the immediate antecedents, of belief are always at least supposed grounds or reasons. Belief is never directly produced, never finally or strictly speaking caused, by what is not at least imagined to be a reason, at least deemed to be a real perception of truth. The so-called causes and antecedents of belief which are wholly non-rational or irrational—desires, passions, and various of the other influences to which I have already referred—do not of themselves determine belief,—are not in direct and immediate contact with, but act on it only through disposing and biasing the intellect to take bad reasons for good, weak reasons for strong, errors for truths. Authority, for instance, which Mr. Balfour opposes to reason, receives the mental assent, the intellectual homage, of no human being simply as authority. All faith in it deems itself reasonable. Let any one assail any form of religious or political authority in the name of reason and he will find the believers in it ready to do battle with him in the same name. Mr. Balfour himself, while opposing authority to reason, tries to do justice to it, and is largely successful in doing it justice. But how? Just *with reasons*, which of itself surely implies that authority and reason, an antecedent and a ground of belief, are not “entirely distinct.”

Reasons are also causes of belief. Good reasons are its only true causes. And, I must add, it is just such reasons, just legitimate causes, which are the most permanent ones, and those which acquire constantly increasing power as the religious history of humanity advances, while those causes which are not real and satisfactory reasons become proportionally less influential in forming and modifying religious belief. As religious belief develops it comes gradually to rest more and more on its rational grounds, its appropriate evidences, and to shake off more and more its dependence on what is unworthy of it. Thus has it been for instance with the belief in Deity. It has become from age to age loftier and purer, more reasonable, more moral and spiritual; has gradually cast out the elements of arbitrariness and grossness which defiled and debased it in its earlier stages, and gradually absorbed into itself all that is best. Immoral and irrational conceptions of the Divine have been one after another thrown aside. In the struggle of religions for existence the victory has been surely although slowly with the fittest, in the sense of the truest, the purest, the most satisfying to the higher nature of man. There is a fact which tends to show that man has been made for the attainment and realisation of religious truth; and that the sceptical inference to the contrary has no more warrant than the other sceptical inferences already rejected. The testimony of history so far as it goes decidedly contradicts what scepticism would affirm. It certifies that progress, not retrogression, is the rule in religion, just as in science, in morality, and in art. I say the rule; not

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the necessary or inevitable law, not what has been or must be in all circumstances, not what occurs independently of the free choice of men and the prudent and energetic exertion of their faculties, yet what is certainly a fact of the most unquestionable and comprehensive kind.

Are there any reasons for that fact,—the progressive and expanding rationality and truthfulness of religious belief? There are, and they only confirm the inference which the fact itself naturally suggests, and which scepticism vainly denies.

One reason is that belief is what it is. It always and of its very nature refers to knowledge and truth. It is only in them that it can find its self-justification. As soon as the suspicion that they are absent enters into it restlessness and pain make themselves felt. Hence doubt not only plays a large part but often a beneficent part in religion. Hence also belief even at its lowest tends to become belief at its highest; tends towards the assurance which can only be found in adequate evidence, in conclusively discovered truth, even as a seed germinates and seeks the light in order to its full development as a plant or tree.

Another reason is that human nature is what it is. Although it contains a great variety of particular powers, passions, and affections, which have their several peculiarities, and are often in conflict, yet, as Bishop Butler has so conclusively shown, it is also a constitution, a system, an organic whole; and this precisely because all its several susceptibilities, tendencies, and activities are rightfully, however far



from being so actually, under the guidance and control of one great governing principle,—the power which distinguishes truth from error, right from wrong. In other words, human nature is essentially rational and moral. It can only develop normally in so far as it moves towards truth and conformity to duty. Its true destination, however long it may take to realise it, is to have reason not as the slave but as the master of imagination and passion; conscience not as the dependent but the director of all particular feelings and interests.

Still another reason is that the world and history are what they are,—the one a system rationally planned, and the other a process rationally directed. All particular causes are both so arranged, co-ordinated, and controlled that they subserve a general rational end. They may seem forces of the same rank as reason, and able to oppose it with success, but they are found to be in the long-run its instruments. They so operate as ultimately to profit reason. Nature and history may appear to exhibit merely the play of blind forces, but, in fact, each is a drama of which the law and issue is the glory of rationality and morality.

Further, certain causes influence religious belief which, although not directly and entirely reasons for it, are conditions of its reasonableness. Such are (*a*) the extension of knowledge and science; (*b*) the growth of reason and of the general ideas which rule it; (*c*) the growth of conscience, enlargement of moral vision; (*d*) the growth of the affections, refinement of the feelings; and (*e*) the teaching and action

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of great religious personalities. None of these facts or forces are directly rational grounds of religious belief, but they are factors which aid in conforming it to reason. The extension of knowledge does so. A man may believe what is not in accordance with knowledge, but he cannot believe the contrary of what he knows, or, in other words, what he is aware to be false.<sup>1</sup> The progress of Astronomy, Geology, Biology, &c., have greatly amended religious belief, and thereby advanced theology. The development of reason and of its ruling ideas is a closely connected and kindred cause. Hence the interests of philosophy and of theology are inseparable. Every advance of the former is to the advantage of the latter. The growth of the idea of unity destroyed polytheism. The clear apprehension of the idea of law has made crude and extravagant forms of belief in miracles generally impossible. The regulative ideas of reason are, in fact, the strongest forces in the world, and their power is nowhere more clearly traceable than in the spiritual history of humanity. As regards conscience, there can be no doubt that as man rises in the scale of being it becomes clearer, purer, and stronger, rules more effectively the whole mind and conduct, and gradually vanquishes the views of God and of God's relations to mankind which grieve and offend it. In like manner, proportionally to the refinement of man's nature and affections, he ceases

<sup>1</sup> The doctrine of "twofold truth" has never been held, so far as I am aware, with complete sincerity. The distinction between "credita" and "physica," on which Averroes, Pomponazzi, and Galileo rested it, was only a prudential device against religious persecution.

to be able to believe the gross dogmas or to practise the coarse and immoral rites congenial to him in the savage state. No one will deny that great personalities have been immense forces in the religious history of mankind. Nor can it be reasonably denied that on the whole they have been forces which acted mainly on the side of truth and reason. Although Confucius, Gotama, and Mohammed have propagated much error, they have diffused still more truth. The religions which they founded are great religions because of the great truths and high aspirations to which they have given powerful and enduring expression.

Every consistent theist, it must be added, will maintain that there is a still deeper reason than those already mentioned for the course of humanity having been towards ever-increasing enlightenment and improvement. It is that God is and is what He is,—the source of all dependent existence, the supreme and infinite Reason to whose all comprehensive and ever-operative will the essential rationality of human nature, the wonderful order of the physical universe, and the intellectual and moral progress in history, are alone consistently traceable. It is the glory of our finite reasons to be able to discern in some measure the course and direction in which the Infinite Reason has been working through millions of ages. We not only believe but certainly know that there were millions of ages during which, through stage after stage of merely physical development, preparation was made for organic and animal life, and also that when the preparation was complete

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the life appeared, and through stage after stage far more wonderful and in forms innumerable, was developed, but ever in the main onwards and upwards. We, further, not only believe but know that those stages of the evolution of the earth issued in the appearance of man, a being distinct from all other beings of the earth, in that he feels himself akin in his personality and in his spiritual affinities and aspirations to the Divine. The formation of man is, according to the development theory itself, the goal towards which the physical world has tended from the beginning. After the appearance of man the interest of the evolution of the world ceases to be mainly physical or animal, and becomes mainly spiritual. It lies not in the production of new species of beasts, but in the improvement of mankind. The history of mankind is probably yet only in the earlier stages of a course to which no end can be assigned, but so far as it has proceeded it has clearly been on the whole an education into truth and virtue. With that great fact before him the theist at least cannot fail to ask, Is it conceivable that the Reason which has thus willed and worked throughout the past will depart from the line of procedure which He has followed throughout so many millions of ages, and henceforth work not towards the higher but towards the lower, not towards the light but towards the darkness, not towards truth but towards falsehood, not towards the elevation but towards the degradation of the spirits whom He calls into being? Assuredly the answer of the theist will be, No. To him at least such a conception can only seem self-contradictory

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and absurd—the conception of an Irrational Reason. And well may we, I think, adopt his answer; and while guarding against forming exaggerated estimates of progress, or overlooking the reasons which abound for thinking it will be slow, toilsome, and painful, both acknowledge its existence in the past and trust that it will be carried on in the future to a glorious future. Well may we, looking back on the past,

“rest in the faith  
That man’s perfection is the crowning flower,  
Towards which the urgent sap in life’s great tree  
Is pressing,—seen in puny blossoms now,  
But in the world’s great morrows to expand  
With broadest petal and with deepest glow.”

### VI. TRUE INFERENCES FROM PREVALENCE OF FALSE RELIGIOUS BELIEF

Having now seen what inferences are not to be drawn from the prevalence of false religious belief and from its explanation, it only remains for me to indicate in this chapter some inferences which may be truly drawn from them.

Obviously one such inference is that there is much need for care and caution in the formation of our religious beliefs. Seeing that false religious belief is so prevalent, and that there is so much to produce it, all general eulogies of believing and all general denunciations of doubting in regard to religious matters must be exceedingly foolish. There is plainly far too much assurance and far too little hesitation in a vast number of minds as regards what is true

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and what is false in such matters. For one who believes too little there are, if society as a whole be considered, hundreds who believe too much, too readily, without adequate and independent reflection. An enormous number of mankind are enslaved, duped, and exploited by those who claim to be their religious teachers, as well as by those who undertake to be their political leaders, owing mainly to their own credulity, their precipitancy of judgment, their want of consideration and reflection, of criticism and investigation. What the world requires is not more faith but only more faith of a right kind: more of the faith which rests on knowledge, which conforms to evidence, which does not pretend to certainty when it has not got it, which does not despise even the lowest degrees of probability when they are real, which seeks to follow whatever light there is, and which fears no criticism because absolutely truthful.

Another inference is the need of being on our guard against unreasonable doubt or excessive disbelief. We are bound to doubt and disbelieve as well as to believe according to evidence, conformably to reason. What is true of our beliefs is in this respect true also of our doubts and disbeliefs, for doubt is itself, as we have seen, of the nature of belief, and disbelief is negative or antagonistic belief. The same causes which prevent men from believing aright prevent them from doubting or disbelieving aright. All influences which move them to the too hasty acceptance of error indispose them to the acceptance of truth on evidence. Indolence, prejudice,



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passion, &c., may lead to the rejection of the very strongest evidence. No evidence will produce assent if, instead of being carefully and candidly appreciated, it is unexamined or examined only with the determination to find flaws in it. Nowhere may passion causes be more clearly seen to have had excessive influence and truly rational considerations less than their due than among atheists, so-called religious freethinkers, and social anarchists. To feel adequately the importance of being on our guard alike against credulity, superstition, undue doubt, and excessive disbelief in the spiritual sphere, we must realise as we ought the necessity and value of true religious belief both to individuals and societies. Without such belief moral distinctions will not be seen in their real sacredness, nor the passions curbed, nor burdens borne, nor self-sacrifices made, as they require to be if the souls of individuals and the lives of societies are to prosper. It is vain to think that mere science or mere ethics will suffice. "As well trust," says Mr. Harrison, "in the rule of three and the maxims in a copy-book to enable us to deal with the storms and trials of life."

What has just been stated suggests as a third inference that in regard to religious belief it must be the part of wisdom to concern oneself chiefly with what is essential and vital, central and practical, in religion, and to seek especially to be well grounded and firmly fixed in faith therein. We ought to distinguish between those eternal religious verities a realisation of which is directly and immediately necessary to the welfare of our spirits, and all ques-

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tions regarding religion which may be interesting but the solution of which is not indispensable. A very short creed may be much better than a long one, and quite sufficient if received intelligently and firmly. The Lord's Prayer is short; but if a man thoroughly believe it—thoroughly believe in God's Fatherhood, man's brotherhood, the sacredness of God's name, the grandeur and the claims of God's kingdom, the obligations of God's will, and our dependence on Him for the supply of our bodily wants, for pardoning mercy, and for deliverance from temptation and evil—he will not only pray aright but live aright, need fall into no very deadly error, may safely be content to form no conclusion as to many keenly debated religious questions, and to take no part in many distracting religious controversies, but apply himself heartily and joyously to serve God in whatever work He in His providence assigns him.

My final inference would be that religious belief ought to be the reasonable belief of the whole man,—of the whole spirit. All belief ought to be reasonable. We have no right to believe what we do not know to be true, or more than we know to be true. Evidence should be the measure of assent. Assent should be in proportion to evidence. For elsewhere maintaining that view I have been more than once described by reviewers as a rationalist. And if to hold that belief to be legitimate must be regulated by and conformed to reason is to be a *rationalist*, undoubtedly I am a rationalist—an unblushing and impenitent rationalist—who considers all those who do not thus far agree with him to be *irrationalists*.

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But I by no means think that the reason to which belief ought to be conformed is so-called pure reason or mere ratiocination. Nor is it exclusively either what Reid calls any one of its offices or degrees, or what Mr. Balfour calls either "its ordinary and popular" or its "transcendental" sense—either "the merely critical and inferential process" with which he identifies it or "the Logos or Absolute Reason." It is no isolated entity, separate faculty, or abstraction of any kind. It is reason, however, in the ordinary and popular sense in which we all speak of those who have become insane and morally irresponsible as having "lost their reason," and also in the sense in which the term has been more largely used than in any other by philosophers from ancient times to the present day. It is not reason divorced from any inherent power or legitimate affection of the human mind, but reason conjoined with them all, with sense, perception, and conception, with intuition, judgment, and inference, with imagination, with appetites and desires, with moral and spiritual susceptibilities and aspirations. It is the entire rational self, regulating all and not dispensing with any of the principles and powers of human nature so far as they can be rationally controlled, made "subservient to moral purposes," and "auxiliar to Divine." "Vernunft," says a recent writer on Logic, "ist der Gesamtausdruck für die höchste, umfassendste, gesteigertste Bethätigung des gesamten Seelenlebens des Menschen."<sup>1</sup> Reason cannot dispense with the aid, for instance, even of imagina-

<sup>1</sup> H. Wolff, *Handbuch d. Logik*, p. 162.

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tion in any department of science or any sphere of ordinary life. Why should it be expected to do so in religion so long as it keeps imagination in due dependence on itself? A religion which does not satisfy the natural and legitimate desires of the heart cannot be a true or reasonable religion. While every evil passion tends to pervert religious belief, all generous sympathies, all pure affections, all refined feelings, all upward tendencies, aid reason in its quest of religious truth. Why should reason, the rational *ego*, in the region of religion, or in any other region, cut off its own wings or cut itself off from any source of strength? As it is with the whole mind and heart and soul that we should love Absolute Truth and Perfect Goodness, so is it also with the whole mind and heart and soul that we should believe in them.

When I say that a great many persons believe a great deal too much, by that I mean merely that they believe a great deal which they have no good evidence for believing, no real right to believe,—a great deal that is false and mischievous. Far be it from me, however, to say that we believe too much in the sense of believing too strongly, too thoroughly, too heartily what is true and good, well-founded, sufficiently attested. A weak, a wavering, a half-hearted faith in what is entitled to a firm, a thorough, a complete faith, is always a great misfortune and often a grievous fault. In the faith with which we devote ourselves to the service of the Supreme there should be no weakness or wavering, doubt or fear. In the faith with which we offer ourselves up on His altar there should be all of life and energy,

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of thought and goodness, which is in us. Nothing which is required of us should be reserved or withheld.

### VII. BASES OF AGNOSTIC RELIGIOUS BELIEF IN CHRISTIANITY

Religious agnostics while professing belief in God deny that the basis of that belief is to be found in knowledge. The denial raises the question, Where, then, do they themselves find a foundation for their belief? And the obvious answer is that it can only be in some sort of belief itself. So obvious is it that all forms of religious agnosticism have given it, and avowedly rest on some species or variety of belief. To knowledge religious agnosticism opposes belief, to reason faith.

The question of the relationship between knowledge and belief, reason and faith, was by no means unknown to or undiscussed by Hindu and Arabian thinkers. The history of the struggle between the two powers, however, is one which has been for the most part confined to Christendom. It was not raised in classical antiquity, owing to the strange dissociation of religion and truth in the Græco-Roman mind. It inevitably arose, however, when Christianity made its presence felt in the world. "I am the Truth," said Christ, and it was as "the Truth" that Christianity claimed to be received and to be the power of God unto salvation. It was for *the Truth* that every Christian martyr suffered. Some of the early Christian fathers were led by their zeal against pagan philosophy to harsh censure of all philosophy and to oc-

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casional denials of the authority of reason, but none of them were so unwise as to attempt to raise scepticism to the rank of a method of producing believers. The relationship of reason and faith, knowledge and belief, was carefully and earnestly studied by several of the most eminent scholastic divines; but it was only at the Renaissance and Reformation—only, that is to say, when reason began to take up an attitude of antagonism to religion and to challenge and reject the doctrines of the Church—that the question of the interconnection and respective rights of the two powers come distinctly into the foreground as of primary and fundamental importance. It has occupied the minds of all the chief philosophers and theologians of the modern era. The names of Bacon and Descartes, of Hobbes and Spinoza, of Malebranche, Arnauld, and Pascal, of Hooker, Bossuet, Locke, Leibniz, and Wolf, of Kant, Jacobi, Fries, Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling, of Herbart, Krause, and Baader, of Hamilton, Mansel, and J. H. Newman, are among those most generally known in connection with it, but a host of others might be added to them. Obviously, too, the question is here to stay. There are no signs of cessation of interest, or even of decrease of interest, in it. As it concerns equally philosophy and theology, and both vitally, the discussion of it is never arrested. The literature to which it has given rise is consequently already enormous.

I have happily to deal only with a special phase of the subject, or, more definitely speaking, only to indicate and appreciate the forms which religious agnosticism—the agnosticism which retains religious



belief while discarding religious knowledge—may assume, and has in fact assumed. I shall arrange them according to the stages of religious belief, or, what comes to the same thing, according to the reasons which religious belief, notwithstanding its repudiation of knowledge, has given in justification of itself. In doing so it seems expedient to take as our example or type of religious belief the kind of it with which we are most familiar, the kind of it prevalent throughout Christendom—belief in Christianity.

Christianity presents itself to us with the demand to be received as a true and momentous manifestation of the character and will of God. It can only be received by being believed. The unbelief of it is the rejection of it. But all belief of it is not the same kind of belief. Belief is a state of mind which has various stages. I may believe, for instance, that parallelograms on the same base and between the same parallels are equal to one another because I know that Euclid and other mathematicians say so, or because I have measured such parallelograms and found them equal as asserted, or because I have demonstrated their equality. But the belief which rests on any one of those grounds is decidedly different both in nature and in worth from the belief which rests on either of the other grounds. In all the three cases it rests on evidence; but the evidence is in the first instance the evidence of testimony, in the second that of practical verification, and in the third that of mathematical demonstration. Religious belief and Christian faith may, in the same way, be based on different grounds, and some of those

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grounds may be more satisfactory and more elevated than others. Belief in the being and presence of God and faith in the teaching and work of Christ may have, yea, undoubtedly have, different stages, and may be in one stage surer, purer, and higher than in another. All belief is founded on supposed evidence, and all legitimate belief is founded on real evidence; but belief may be legitimate as resulting from real evidence, although not belief of the highest order,—belief founded on the most appropriate and conclusive evidence. We ought not, however, to regard belief as spurious and false merely because it is of an inferior kind. If we apprehend the meaning of a mathematical proposition it is by no means indifferent whether we believe it or not, even should we have no higher ground for our belief than the testimony of mathematicians. Even such belief is better than non-belief or disbelief. The evidence on which it rests is good evidence, although not the best. What is believed is true, and truth is always greatly to be preferred to error.

While, however, we are not to count worthless any sincere belief which rests on any real evidence, neither are we to count belief in a lower stage equal to belief in a higher, but should seek to be conscious of the defects in all faith short of that which rests on the most thorough knowledge attainable of what is believed. If instead of so doing we persist in taking an inferior kind of belief as belief at its best, or the only legitimate sort of belief, then are we genuine agnostics, seeing that we reject as illusory or unattainable all the higher knowledge on which alone a

higher faith can be founded. Were a man foolish enough to maintain that belief in mathematical propositions should only rest on testimony, he would clearly be an agnostic in mathematics, however well he might mean towards it, inasmuch as he denied the attainability of all knowledge of mathematics from measurement and demonstration. Of course, no person is so foolish in regard to mathematics. As to religion, however, a great many are thus foolish. There are some who pronounce each form or stage of religious faith the only legitimate or reliable one, and who discredit and reject all others. Those who do so often have the best intentions towards religion, but their good intentions should not prevent us from considering them as agnostics, or from deeming them to the extent of their agnosticism dangerous to religion, however sincerely friendly to it they may be, and although their religiousness or piety need not be called in question.

The religious non-agnostic holds that religious beliefs ought to have rational bases, to be adequately attested as true by appropriate evidence, and so to be in accordance with knowledge. The non-religious agnostic holds that religious beliefs have no rational bases, are incapable of being proved true by satisfactory evidence, and are not found to be accordant with knowledge. It is the position taken up by the latter which here concerns us. And a very strange position it is, and seemingly a most perilous one for the agnostic himself. He too has beliefs,—anti-religious and non-religious beliefs. How does he propose to justify *them*? Has he found out any other

or better way of doing so than the way in which the religious non-agnostic undertakes to justify his beliefs, namely, by reason, evidence, and knowledge? That is the only way in which beliefs of any kind can be justified. Hence the agnostic has not only to refute the beliefs of the non-agnostic but to establish his own, although he can only do so on non-agnostic principles. To the whole extent of his agnosticism he can neither consistently refute the beliefs of others nor justify his own, and when a fully developed agnostic he cannot consistently regard any basis of knowledge sure, any standard of truth reliable, any reasons either positively or negatively conclusive. How then can he hope in the least for success? Only by fancying that he can reduce all so-called knowledge to mere belief, or, in other words, can make out that there is no real difference between belief and knowledge. It is well known how Hume tried to prove knowledge only exceptionally vivacious belief. It is not so well known that most clear-sighted sceptics, ancient and modern, have in various ways sought to do the same. They have endeavoured to represent the reference of belief to knowledge as illusory, on the ground that knowledge itself is essentially identical with belief. Were that so, all seeming knowledge would really be mere belief, and radical scepticism might fairly claim to have been victorious. In that case all belief would rest merely on itself, and not only all religion and theology, but also all so-called philosophy, science, and ordinary knowledge would have to be regarded as the products of credulity.

What the radical agnostic, however, is logically bound to do, cannot rationally be done. The attempts made to do it, or to represent it as done, have necessarily failed. They have misrepresented the clear and unequivocal testimony of consciousness, dealt freely in erroneous descriptions of belief and knowledge, and in various ways so abused the terms belief and knowledge as either to confound the facts which they denote, or erroneously to separate and contrast them. Agnosticism can neither disprove that knowledge and belief are closely and indissolubly connected, nor that they are manifestly distinct. Knowledge and belief are indissolubly connected, inasmuch as, although we can believe without knowing, we cannot know without believing. To say that we know what we do not believe, or know to be true what we believe to be false, or even what we cannot decide whether it be true or false, is to say what is self-contradictory and nonsensical. Wherever there is knowledge there is belief, and the knowledge is the rational and adequate basis of the belief, the only such basis. But belief is far more extensive than knowledge. There can be belief where there is no knowledge,—where there is merely the supposition of knowledge. There can be belief where there are error, ignorance, illusion, and insanity. Belief is often—what knowledge never is—a holding for true that which is false, a mistaking for accurate perceptions those which are erroneous, for correct judgments such as are incorrect, and for legitimate processes of reasoning more or less manifest fallacies. Knowledge is always the holding for true what is

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true; and the true is that which is the expression of external or internal, physical or spiritual, reality, and which is valid, not for one mind only, but for all sane minds. The bases of knowledge are our mental activities working in accordance with the intuitions of reason, the conditions of accurate perception and judgment, and the laws of legitimate inference. Mere belief is not the basis. No mere belief is knowledge. All knowledge properly so called is a good foundation, the only good foundation, for belief. The agnostic can neither show that belief is identical with knowledge nor that knowledge rests on belief, and so long as he cannot do that he has no right to profess agnosticism.

The author of a recent and interesting treatise on *Knowledge, Belief, and Certitude*—F. Storrs Turner—has arrived at the conclusion that *all knowledge is belief* thus. “All knowledge,” he tells us, “is doubly dependent; first on consciousness, and through consciousness on reality.” Then he asks, “Can these two axioms, ‘consciousness never deceives us,’ ‘nature or the reality never deceives us,’ be *proved*?” And his answer is, “Assuredly not. They are beliefs. They also require a ground or reason. Into the question of the ground or grounds upon which consciousness and reality are accepted as perfectly trustworthy, it is not necessary to enter now, for we are making no objection to belief in them. The important fact for us is that knowledge depends upon these axioms for its own existence. *Knowing is believing*. There is no other way of knowing. Whether there is any believing which is not knowing is a point



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which may remain over for a separate consideration" (p. 453).

According to that view, knowledge is the basis of belief and belief is the basis of knowledge, so that knowledge lies, as it were, between an upper and an under kind of belief, and at once supports belief and is supported by it. Such a view does not appear to be at all consistent with an admission of the existence of knowledge properly so called. No knowledge rests on mere belief, and no mere belief, no belief which does not to some extent rest on knowledge, comes into contact with reality. Then is it not an abuse of language to designate the two propositions, "consciousness never deceives us," and "nature or the reality never deceives us," axioms? I hold that it is, and even question their right to be considered reasonable *beliefs*. Who believes them? Certainly they are not *axioms* in any proper sense of the term, but the crudest of generalisations. Knowledge and science would indeed be in imminent danger had they to rely on such pseudo-axioms instead of on real axioms and laws of thought, like the principles of causality, of identity, of contradiction, of excluded middle, &c., on the immediate introspective and perceptive powers of the mind, on appropriate methods of research, and on the adequately ascertained and attested truths accumulated in past ages. Consciousness in the general or popular sense of the term often deceives us. It is only when restricted to its philosophical sense, and to the attestation of the one fundamental fact that "along with whatever is known self or the *ego* is necessarily known," that it can be

truly said never to deceive us, and then it is manifestly not merely belief but immediate cognition. As for the proposition "nature or reality never deceives us," to say that *reality* never deceives us is just to say that reality is always real, or, in other words, is mere tautology, while to say that *nature*, in any reasonable sense of the term, *never deceives* us, is not in accordance with fact. Merely physical nature, indeed, cannot deceive in the same sense as human nature can and does, but even it is full of illusions which ordinary, and even scientific intelligence, has much difficulty in distinguishing from realities. No poet, perhaps, has ever admired nature more than Wordsworth, but even he has not ventured to say more than that "she never doth deceive the hearts of those who love her." Animal and human nature both deceive in the strictest sense of the term. Many animals are adepts in deception, and entire species of them would soon become extinct were they not. A Hebrew psalmist confesses to have said, "in his haste, all men are liars." The question has been asked, Might he not have said so at his leisure? It might be difficult to decide whether savage or civilised men are the more deceitful. "The heart of man"—human nature—says Jeremiah, "is deceitful above all things," and that is a much better generalisation than Mr. Turner's "nature never deceives us"; but neither the one nor the other is an axiom upon which knowledge depends for its existence. Knowing implies believing, but it is misleading to say that "*knowing* is *believing*," when what is distinctive of knowing is the apprehension and acquisition of truth, which war-

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rants believing, and produces reasonable belief. That there is a vast amount of believing which is not knowing will not be found to call for any special consideration. Who has ever met with a man who does not believe more than he knows?

We need not dwell further on the agnosticism which by identifying, or rather confounding, belief and knowledge, would base religion on a belief exclusive of knowledge. There are, however, forms of agnosticism—religious agnosticism—which rest on different grounds of belief, and these have now to be briefly considered, belief in Christianity, as already intimated, being taken as the type or example of belief.

### VIII. RELIGIOUS BELIEF AND TRANSMITTED COMMON DOCTRINE AND GENERAL CONSENT

One ground on which religious belief, including belief in Christianity, has been largely rested is the authority of transmitted common doctrine and general consent. Belief at that stage and resting on that ground has so firm a rational basis that no community ever wholly outgrows it. A critical sceptical attitude of mind towards the views and sentiments of those with whom we are closely associated and in general sympathy is not the rule but the exception. When any belief or system of belief has laid hold of one generation it naturally and easily passes to the next. Were it otherwise there would be no such thing as a common faith,—no such thing as national creeds, as Brahminism in India, Mohammedanism in Turkey, Catholicism in Italy, Lutheranism in Germany, Pres-

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byterianism in Scotland, &c. Were it otherwise there could even hardly be any family, social, or religious life at all. To some extent all who accept Christianity, and to a large extent the great majority of those who do, receive it because the belief of it prevails throughout the community into which they were born and in which they grew up. The faith of the individual is always in some measure rooted in and determined by the faith of the community.

Sceptics have often made use of that fact in order to discredit religious belief and Christian faith. But in doing so they have generally overlooked two closely related facts. The first of them is that scepticism itself is a system of beliefs. Its disbeliefs are also beliefs. And the disbeliefs of scepticism are in many instances as much due to the action of social tradition and the social medium as the beliefs of religious communities. No impartial inquirer can come to any other conclusion as to the beliefs of the great majority of English secularists and French atheists. The influence of political traditions and of social prejudices is nowhere more manifest. The second fact to which I refer is that what is true of religious belief with reference to religion and common consent is largely true also of what is called scientific belief. The generality of mankind accept the results of science mainly on the ground that scientists are agreed in accepting them, and that public opinion is in accordance with what the scientists teach. There is nothing unreasonable in accepting scientific truths on that ground when you have no better on which to rely. The common consent of the scientists and of the com-

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munity is a fact which requires to be accounted for, and one which can best be explained on the supposition that it is well founded. The general belief of chemists and other physicists in the atomic theory is only intelligible by there being a large amount of truth in it. A universal and continuous assent to any proposition is *prima facie* a strong presumption in favour of its truth. Widely spread and long prevalent systems of belief have generally a large amount of reasonableness, sufficient to account in no small measure for the extent of their diffusion and the tenacity with which they are clung to.

Our two chief living English agnostics—Leslie Stephen and Herbert Spencer—cannot be charged with having overlooked the significance of the traditional factor in belief. Nor have they undervalued it. On the contrary, both of them have made such large concessions to traditionalism that they may not unjustly be regarded as at once agnostics and traditionalists.

Mr. Stephen's ultimate test of the character of opinion or doctrine is not reason, not logic, but evolution in the natural history sense of the term, or at least in the Darwinian sense of "the survival of the fittest." The belief which in the struggle for existence overcomes and displaces all rival beliefs is the fittest, and, therefore, in so far as man can attain truth, the truest. His point of view has been thus described by himself: "The evolutionist holds that, in the struggle for existence, the truest opinion tends to survive; and thus, that whilst no generation is in possession of the whole truth, the history of belief is

## STEPHEN AND NEWMAN'S VIEWS

that of a slow gravitation towards truth. Some doctrines which have survived all changes, and strengthened under all conditions, may be definitely established as true, or at least as indefinitely close approximations to truth. Others are disappearing, or requiring transformation. By studying the history of opinion from this point of view we may obtain, not a self-subsisting and independent system of philosophy, but an indispensable guide towards further approximations. We can use history without being under the tyranny of the past. We can value the postulates upon which men have acted without investing them with supernatural authority."

Such is the point of view from which Mr. Stephen has criticised and censured J. H. Newman's *Theory of Development*. And so far as regards merely the theory of Newman his criticism of it seems to me conclusive and his censure just. To what, however, does he owe his victory, if victory it be? Solely, I think, to his theory being at once more traditionalist and more sceptical than Newman's own. Newman very largely evaded the logical question as to truth. Mr. Stephen evades it wholly, and so has relatively to Newman the consistency of completeness. He thus gains the right to charge him with "sanctioning a method of playing fast and loose with facts which make the apparent appeal to history a mere illusion." Yet his own theory is even less satisfactory. It is a rash assumption to accept the Darwinian hypothesis of "the survival of the fittest" on the mere character of its history. The chief doctrines of religion have had a far more solid and comprehensive historical



basis. His amalgamation of traditionalism and scepticism leaves little if any room for either real truth or rationality.

The student of Mr. Spencer's writings cannot fail to have been struck with the poverty of his argumentation against religious doctrine, the doctrine of the cognoscibility of God alone excepted, which he attacks with the weapons provided by Mansel. For the rejection of theological doctrines and religious beliefs generally the one argument alone and always in requisition is that while scientific doctrines are constantly gaining more and more the assent of men and greater and greater influence over them, as regards theological doctrines the reverse is true. In his criticism of Mr. Balfour's *Foundations of Belief* he represents the whole conflict between his own philosophy and Mr. Balfour's as turning on that thesis, and to be decided with reference to it. Any impartial and comprehensive comparison of the history of theology with the history of almost any other science will not fail to show that the existence of the contrast on which Mr. Spencer would hazard the fate of his philosophy is a mere imagination. Theistic doctrine judged of by its history is at least as strongly presumptive of its being true, of its being inexplicable on the supposition of its falsity, as any corresponding doctrine judged of by the same standard.

There are two opposite extremes of opinion as to the function and worth of tradition in religion, a depreciatory and an exaggerated view of its influence and value. Protestantism, although it has practically accepted tradition, has done so half-heartedly, and

## CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT EXTREMES

tends to the former view. Protestants often hold crude and exaggerated conceptions of private judgment. Catholics are apt to entertain as crude and exaggerated conceptions regarding a common consent which rests on passively accepted tradition. All religious belief of much worth is now largely traditional, just as all scientific belief is. The whole of Christendom has inherited far the greater portion both of its religion and of its science from the past, and is no more entitled to scoff at its traditional religion than at its traditional science.

We have no right to suppose that those who inherit Christianity are Christians merely because they have inherited it; that they have no insight into its truth; that they have wholly failed to verify the faith in which they acquiesce. There may be such, many such—many who believe simply because others believe and just what others believe. But obviously all such are unworthy of the great gift which history and tradition have brought them, and what faith they have is of a low and imperfect kind. The value of the traditional in religion becomes fully apparent only when conjoined with, not when exclusive of, the personal. The thought and experience of the race is due to the exertions of the individuals composing it, and the success of individual exertions has been made possible owing to the vast wealth of thought and experience with which tradition is freighted. Those who inherit Christianity are not to be assumed to be Christians merely because they have inherited it and been told that it was true. It is no more than justice to suppose that in almost all cases there has been to

some extent insight into the truth of what they were taught and verification of the faith in which they acquiesce, and that in not a few cases there has been a careful examination of the common creed.

There is, however, it must be granted, a stage of faith in which the individual is excessively and slavishly dependent on the community and its beliefs and traditions. At that stage men believe for the most part just because others believe and just what others believe. It should be obvious, one would think, that that must be a low and imperfect stage. Faith ought to be personal and active; ought to have some better reason to give for itself than that others share it. If those who agree in a faith have no other reason for it than that they agree, the dependence of each upon all is obviously one in which reason has extremely little share indeed. Yet it is a fact that the attempt has been made to represent such impersonal and passive faith—such believing simply because others believe—as the sole type of true faith; and common belief, common consent, as the criterion, or at least the primary criterion, of all truth, and especially of religious truth. For example, a resolute and sustained effort of the kind was made in the early part of last century by a band of French thinkers, some of whom possessed eminent intellectual and literary gifts. Philosophy and theology are indebted to them for having done so much to make the influence of the social medium on the individual sufficiently realised at a time when a disintegrating empiricism was prevalent. To an irreligious and exaggerated individual-

ism they opposed a religious but unfortunately also exaggerated traditionalism.

De Bonald and De Lamennais were its ablest philosophical representatives. The *Essai sur l'Indifférence dans la Matière de Religion* of the latter is the most earnest, impassioned, and eloquent attempt ever made to found a doctrine of traditionalism on sceptical bases. In that work De Lamennais was not content merely to argue that all modern philosophy was radically vicious and tended inevitably to scepticism, but he insisted that the individual reason was necessarily doomed to find only error, and to wander in darkness until it renounced itself by an act of faith in tradition and the self-sacrifice of individual opinion to catholic or common consent. He employed all the chief arguments of scepticism against the senses, against the sentiments and the reasonings, of those who deemed truth and certitude attainable by the self-activity of individual minds. He refused to admit that we are even of ourselves sure that we feel. He rejected the testimony of self-consciousness, and maintained that just because based on that hopelessly false foundation all the systems of thought devised during the previous four centuries had contradicted and destroyed one another, leaving, as they passed in rapid succession, scarcely a wrack behind, yet each pushing humanity onwards towards the abyss of universal scepticism. The wise man falsely so called of the modern world had all alike in his estimation started from the individual consciousness as a first and sure principle, and had differed only as to which of its forms, as to what capacity of the mind,

what faculty of the conscious being, should be supposed to have in it the supreme criterion of certainty, —whether sense, or feeling, or reason. He affirmed that the principle from which they started was false, and maintained that the criterion of truth is to be found in none of its forms, in no faculty of the mind; that the only criterion of our senses, of our feelings, of our judgments and inferences, being true, is that they agree in their deliverances with those of others. The individual lives merely with the life of the race. All true thought is transmitted belief. The individual is dependent for his intelligence, its operations so far as legitimate, and its conclusions—religious, political, moral, and social—so far as true, on tradition flowing from a primitive revelation, which pervades the ages, and of which the Catholic Church is alone the custodian and interpreter.

Such was the central conception of the theory which De Lamennais expounded with a passionate earnestness and a magnificent eloquence which for a time greatly stirred and roused the Catholic Church. The defectiveness and self-contradictoriness of it, however, are very obvious. The attack on the trustworthiness of the human faculties and of even the surest criteria of truth was manifestly unwise. An indiscriminate and unsparing assault on all the primary principles of human thought and on all modern philosophy and science could only end in speedy and utter failure, and necessarily discredited the whole theory which gave rise to it. A scepticism so extreme is self-destructive. If tradition be as worthless in regard to philosophy and science as De Lamennais

maintained, it may fairly be inferred to be also as worthless in regard to Catholic religion and theology. The kind of argumentation which he employed could be applied as logically and effectively against the tradition which he retained and commended as against that which he rejected and condemned. Further, general consent can have no worth if the individual assents of which it is composed have none. Multiplying zeros will never make a positive sum. No addition or elaboration of errors will result in truth. By one's own individual reason to seek to prove, as De Lamennais did, that individual reason is wholly fallacious is so manifestly a fallacious exercise of reason as to prove nothing about reason except that it may be greatly abused. Besides, no man can wholly renounce his own reason and accept instead common consent or collective reason. The individual can only attain to what he individually thinks to be that consent or reason, and in that he may be as much mistaken as in any of his other thoughts. There came a day in the life of De Lamennais when, although he was firmly convinced that the common consent, consciousness, or reason of mankind attested the truth of a certain doctrine, the Pope was convinced that it did not, and declared the doctrine a heresy. The result was that De Lamennais, who had been called "the last of the Fathers" and "a second Bossuet," who had refused the offer of a bishopric and the dignity of the cardinalate, found himself an outcast from the Church which he had so passionately loved. Consent, even if universal to tradition, although uninterrupted, is, I



would add, only worthy of respect when produced by evidence, and then it indicates that the truths assented to are either self-evident or very evident—very simple and clear. It does not otherwise really rest on the truth of what is believed. On the contrary, it assumes that the truth itself cannot be directly, personally, truly known. It is, therefore, an essentially low form of belief, and can only justify itself theoretically against a higher faith by agnostic unbelief.

#### IX. RELATION OF CHARACTER TO HISTORY OF BELIEF

The character of a belief, it may be supposed, will be best attested by its history. “By their fruits ye shall know them” is a maxim applicable to beliefs and systems of belief as well as to individuals and societies. Hence it is not surprising that many attempts have been made both to justify and to discredit religious beliefs and religious systems by the nature of their influence on the lives of individuals and the condition of communities. With those attempts I shall not deal, but I must express my conviction that religious belief and Christian faith cannot in any form be either satisfactorily proved or disproved *merely by any history of religious belief or of the development of Christian faith*. All religious belief, indeed, has a history, and an instructive history, but its history is only history, and its truth must always have some further attestation than the history. When any justification of such belief is attempted the history requires at every point and stage not merely to be ascertained as fact but judged

of by reason and conscience. So every Christian doctrine and Christian creed have a history, but the history is in each case of itself insufficient to establish the truth of the doctrine or creed. It is too fragmentary or dubious, too complex and confused, too capable of being interpreted in various and divergent ways, to do so. Hume's *Natural History of Religion* and Newman's *Theory of Development* are very able and suggestive works; but the attempt made in the former to show the irrationality of religion and the attempt made in the latter to justify the claims of Catholicism are both futile. Hume in order to reach his conclusion had to ignore the operation of reason and the power of truth in the formation of belief, and to leave unexplained intellectual, moral, and spiritual progress in the sphere of religion. That, however, is a prodigious defect, and makes his so-called *Natural History of Religion* very *unnatural* indeed. Newman in order to give plausibility to his theory of religious development had to begin by postulating the existence of an infallible authority outside of the development to distinguish the false from the true in it. Obviously that should not have been postulated but proved. He further selected and manipulated the facts of history to make them suit a foregone conclusion. For example, he excluded from consideration the great ethnic religions, although some of them had dominated the minds of far more millions for more centuries than Christianity itself had done. For proceeding so he had recourse to the plea of the superiority of the civilisation of Western Europe over Oriental civilisa-

tion. Yet he was careful not to take into account the higher and healthier civilisation of Protestant as compared with Catholic nations. The lack of historical impartiality vitiates his whole theory.

To me it seems that no mere history of belief or theory of its development can of itself certify the truth of belief. Any argument even for the truth of Christianity drawn merely from its history must be very inadequate. To prove that Christianity as a system of religious belief has existed and grown through ages, spread over many lands, and been the source of a rich, varied, and vast civilisation; that its development has been continuous and consistent; that its power and influence have been immense and to a large extent beneficent both to individuals and communities is, I fully recognise, not only a valid argument for Christianity, but rightly stated and adequately worked out may be a very powerful and valuable one. Works like Loring Brace's *Gesta Christi*, Dr. Storr's *Divine Origin of Christianity indicated by its Historical Effects*, and Principal Fairbairn's *Religion in History and the Life of To-day*, fully merit the welcome which they have received. The historical argument, however, needs to be supported and supplemented by other modes of proof. It is only a secondary and indirect argument, and cannot deal immediately with the truth itself but only with its external effects. It is greatly to be regretted that in Ritschlian expositions of Christian Apologetics the historical argument is often virtually the only one to be found. An Apologetic so "cribbed, cabined, and confined" within the limits

## BELIEF IN RELATION TO AUTHORITY

of historical experience cannot but prove very inadequate. It must fail to bring the mind into sufficiently close contact with spiritual truth itself,—with the eternal, the supernatural, and Divine.

### X. BELIEF IN RELATION TO AUTHORITY. FORMS OF RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

Another stage of religious belief is that in which belief is rested on authority. It is the stage in which men accept spiritual truths not because they apprehend them by the exercise of their own faculties but because they are enjoined on them by others in whom they have confidence and on whom they feel themselves dependent. Authority is not to be confounded with mere power or arbitrary will—such power as does not rest on reason and refuses to give reasons. The exercise of mere power or will over others is despotism or tyranny—an abuse of power or will—in those who possess it, and implies the slavery and degradation of those who are subjected to it. Authority is clearly distinguishable therefrom. It is the right of an individual or society to be believed or obeyed on account of reasons in whole or in part springing from the character or position of the individual or society—*i.e.*, from reasons not intrinsic to the commands given or claims made. Authority thus understood is unquestionably legitimate and necessary with reference both to the control of external conduct and the guidance of opinion. Society could not be constituted, preserved, and developed without the exercise of authority in both forms.

Faith in all great religions has been spread largely

by authority as well as by reason. Belief in Christianity is no exception to the rule. Christ sought to gain belief in Himself as the condition of belief in His doctrine and of obedience to His commands. He made unparalleled claims to personal authority. The Apostles spoke as men having authority in virtue of a Divine commission. St. Paul has written so emphatically against the sinfulness of resistance to civil authority (Rom. xiii. 1-5) as to have given plausibility to the teaching of those divines who, in England and elsewhere, have argued that all active resistance to civil authority is disobedience to God. When the clergy of the Christian Church had providentially devolved upon them the immense task of guiding and ruling the minds, first of the debased populations of Asia, Greece, and Rome, and then of the rude barbarians who overthrew the Roman Empire, it was most natural that they should have thought that they could not have too much authority on the side of what they believed to be truth, and should have striven to exalt as much as they could the authority which they deemed to be a religious and social necessity. Nor can it be justly denied that, grievous as were the errors into which the medieval Church fell in consequence of its undue reliance on the principle of authority, it was also enabled by means of it to perform wonderful services to religion and humanity. No modern Church is yet great enough to despise the medieval Church—the Church which, with all its faults, was by far the mightiest and most beneficent agent in the formation of Christendom out of barbarism and confusion.

## VALUE AND INFLUENCE OF AUTHORITY

The influence of authority has not yet ceased in the Christian world. Christianity has still no hesitation, no shame, in making use of the authority of parents, teachers, and rulers, in order to impress and mould to its purposes the souls of the youngest, simplest, and least educated. Nor are we entitled to infer that authority has only a transitory value, and will gradually disappear with the progress of enlightenment and freedom. So long as there are social beings and social relationships, authority would seem to be indispensable. Only anarchists, indeed, dream that all human and social authority is hurtful, unjust, and doomed to disappear. But anarchists are generally atheists, blind to the fact that there is a God, a God not of disorder but of order, whose right to authority will never diminish, and whose authority may well be expected to be a perpetual source of authority in subordinate forms. History shows us all forms of human authority varying and continually compelled to adjust their claims to those of personal freedom, equity, and reason, but it does not show us that in any of its forms it is tending towards extinction. There is no essential antagonism, it must be remembered, between authority and freedom, authority and reason, authority and duty. They are to be co-ordinated, not contrasted. To combine and harmonise them ought to be one of the aims of human life. To regard and treat them as naturally antagonistic has been the source of much error and mischief.

The principle of authority as it manifests itself on earth is always a partial truth, and its value is always relative and limited. In the domain of Christianity



it appears in three forms—namely, as (1) Personal Authority, (2) Authority of the Church, and (3) Authority of Scripture.

(1) By *personal authority* I refer here to merely human authority. That authority is obviously only relative and limited. It is a means, and not an end. It is only legitimate when it supplements the defects of a reason which is weak and faltering, and encourages it to learn to exercise its own God-given powers in humble dependence on Divine aid. It is a hurtful tyranny when it seeks to prolong its own sway, instead of honestly endeavouring to make itself as little necessary as possible. Christian faith is a faith which rests on actual apprehension and experience of Christian truth, not a faith which passively accepts what it is told to be Christian truth. It is a faith which has God and Christ and eternal life for its immediate and direct objects, not a faith which has to do with divine realities merely through the mediation of certain official persons. The officials in religious societies have, of course, like the officials in other societies, rights to be respected as well as duties to perform, but they are not lords over God's heritage nor the masters of men's reasons or consciences. They have no other right to religious authority than what superiority in religious knowledge, or in virtue or piety, may give them. A clergyman as regards matters of religion may be expected to be a sort of expert in his sphere, as physicians, lawyers, and scientists are in theirs, and if so, he is entitled to an analogous authority, but not to a specifically different kind of authority. The officials of a religious society are not

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entitled to deprive its members of spiritual rights inherent in their very humanity, and to demand from them a blind faith or an unreasoned obedience. All legitimate authority rests on reasons, and is willing to have its claims submitted to examination. There is no arrogance in examining the claims of any merely earthly authority, spiritual or temporal; on the contrary, such examination is, as a rule, the discharge of a manifest duty. Yet so late as July, 1870, an œcumenical council of a Christian Church was found to declare the personal infallibility, as a dogmatic authority, of its official head. Perhaps no more foolish an act was committed in the nineteenth century. It was one which can be of no real service even to the Catholic Church, and which, I fear, has destroyed all reasonable hope of a reunited Christendom. That the dogma had no warrant in reason, revelation, or history was clearly proved by the leaders of the minority in the Vatican Council itself; but the powers of light failed to dispel the dense darkness and folly of the majority of its members.

(2) Religious belief may also be *based on the authority of the Church*. Any Church as represented by its officials may rightly claim some measure of authority as regards both doctrine and discipline. It could not otherwise be an organised society. That a Church should have authority is inseparable from its having a creed and constitution. No Church, however, is entitled to claim to be an absolute or ultimate authority. A Church ought always to be prepared to lay its claims to authority before the bar of reason. It is a fair question for any one to ask, Why

should I believe what the Church teaches? But it is also a very hard question for any Church which claims absolute lordship over faith to answer consistently with any show of reasonableness. Is it replied that what the Church teaches may be seen and felt by the mind to be true,—that what it declares can be independently verified? Then, in that case, the mind does not really believe on the authority of the Church but on the authority of reason and experience; in other words, it can judge the Church, and determine whether the Church teaches the truth or not, independently of the mere word of the Church. He who so recognises, however, the truth of what the Church teaches has obtained independence of the Church, and can no longer award the highest place to ecclesiastical authority but to the Divine might of truth. The Church becomes in that case simply a witness of truth, without any right to affix the stamp of truth on whatever she is pleased to teach. The answer indicated, therefore, cannot be consistently given.

May a Church, then, boldly claim to have her mere word accepted as the truth,—to have her assertions accepted simply because they are hers? That may seem to be the only consistent position for the Catholic Church to take up, and some of her own teachers have taken their stand upon it. But it requires great audacity thus to demand an implicit unreasoning faith, and even the Catholic Church has not ventured to maintain that what she affirms must be accepted entirely in trust on her word—*i.e.*, without any kind of intelligent verification. The opinion that a blind faith in the mere word of the Church is a funda-

mental doctrine of Catholicism was, in fact, expressly condemned by Pius IX. himself. An able and, I imagine, representative Catholic theologian, Dr. Schanz of Tübingen, writes thus: "A man must hold before he can accept with safety the authority of the Church these seven preliminary truths—the existence of God, the possibility of revelation, the fact of revelation, the history of the Old Testament as substantially genuine, the substantially authentic character of the New Testament, the Deity of Christ, the institution of an enduring Apostolate. A man must be in reason satisfied about these points before surrendering his mind to the dogma of the infallibility of the Church—unless, indeed, he clearly sees a way of establishing the Divine authority of the New Testament Scriptures. Catholic theologians, then, no more claim of themselves the right of assuming the authority of the Church than Protestants may claim the right of the inspiration and Divine authority of the Bible."<sup>1</sup> Well, those words are, I think, very true; but if true, does it not follow that if men are able to know so much as is affirmed, they cannot, if they seek spiritual truth as they ought to do, be so largely dependent on the Church as the Church often endeavours to make them believe? Does not the Church, and especially the Catholic Church, ask men to believe an enormous deal about religion not on the ground that they can know the truth thereof if they will only seek it, but on the ground that they cannot so know it, and must therefore believe what their teachers tell them? To one who holds that faith

<sup>1</sup> *Christian Apology*, vol. iii., Pref., xvi, xvii (E. T.)

should be founded on knowledge and conformed to knowledge that procedure is manifestly agnostic, and any Church adopting it is responsible for the spread of agnosticism. The way in which the Catholic Church has exalted authority has assuredly involved a denial to her members of powers of knowing Divine truth with which they ought to have been credited, and the exercise of which would have made them far less dependent on churchly authority than they have been or ought to be. Hence it is only natural that there should have often appeared among her clergy agnostics of a very pronounced type. With such agnostics she has had much trouble in the way of preventing them from compromising her by the excesses to which they were inclined to go in the glorification of faith at the expense of reason. Most of them she has prevailed on to retract. Her own intrinsically agnostic relationship to religion she has shown neither inclination nor ability to alter.

(3) The faith in Christianity which rests merely or mainly on the authority of the Church is so immature and inconsistent, that it must of necessity be outgrown wherever mental development is not arrested. That was made apparent on a great scale at the epoch of the Reformation. The authority of the Church was then recognised by the most earnest and thoughtful portion of the Christian world to be, notwithstanding all pretensions to the contrary, merely human authority. The deference which had been yielded to it was clearly seen to have been superstitious and debasing. From the word of those who claimed to speak for the Church men turned to the

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Bible as the word of God, and in doing so found strength and support. The word of the priest lost its power to enslave and terrify when the Bible as the written word of God was appealed to in opposition to it. The Reformation rested very largely on the substitution of one authority for another,—on the transference of the seat of religious authority from the Church to the Scriptures. All the leading Reformers were at one in striving to get the Bible fully recognised as the supreme accessible spiritual authority. It was in the Bible that they sought for the substance of their preaching. It was from the Bible that they endeavoured to evolve their creeds. It was by references to the Bible that they undertook to defend all the articles of those creeds. There, then, was another stage of faith,—the stage in which faith rests on the Bible as God's word. But faith may rest even on the Bible as God's word in various ways. And some of those ways may even be *quite agnostic as regards religious truth*. For example, a man may receive the Bible as ultimate authority—an authority above the criticism and independent of the support and confirmation of reason—an authority which makes an unconditioned claim on belief. That is manifestly, however, to accept it in an unintelligent and capricious manner, and the faith which so accepts it is but another form of agnostic unbelief in man's power of knowing religious truth. Belief in the authority of the Bible is as obviously bound to give reasons for itself as belief in the authority of the Church. The authority of the Bible cannot reasonably be taken on trust any more than the authority



of the Pope. The Bible, too, must produce its credentials and submit its claims to criticism. The Reformers failed to recognise the importance of that truth. Nor was it unnatural that they should, seeing that their opponents in the Church of Rome unreservedly admitted that the Bible was God's word, and ought to be fully accepted.

Certain it is that they overlooked a question in which both they and their Catholic opponents were vitally concerned,—the question of evidence. But it was not a question which could be long ignored. It came to be the great question with their successors. They were called on to combat unbelief in special revelation; to meet an enemy holding that a natural religion discoverable by reason was the only religion man needed,—that all religion which did not coincide with natural religion was false or superfluous. Christian theologians were bound to combat that enemy, yet were required to combat it with its own weapons. They had to prove by reason that reason was not sufficient; to humiliate reason so far as to show that supernatural light was necessary, while acknowledging its competence to prove the supernatural what it claimed to be even to those who were most averse to admit its existence. Owing to the operation of various causes, that became the main concern of divines in the eighteenth century. They occupied themselves comparatively little with the spirit or contents of Scripture, or with religious doctrine, feeling, or practice; whereas they were as much employed in “proving Christianity” as if it existed only to be proved. All the theological energy of the

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century concentrated itself on the task of producing and exhibiting evidences sufficient to show that Christianity ought to be believed to be true.

That the evidentialist divines rendered real services to the cause of religion and of human progress cannot fairly be denied, but they by no means succeeded in laying bare the true foundations of religious belief. On the contrary, they may, without injustice, be charged with having divorced faith from reason, belief from knowledge, in a decidedly agnostic manner. For what they sought to make evident was that men are bound to receive Christianity as true, not because they can know it in itself to be true, but notwithstanding their being necessarily unable to know it in itself to be true. They laboured to shut men up to receive Christianity, along with whatever is in the Bible, in the slump, as it were, notwithstanding their necessary ignorance of its essential nature, because in the Bible and guaranteed to have come from God by the miracles and prophecies recorded in the Bible. That, however, was a very unsatisfactory procedure, and such faith as was thereby attainable could not be other than a poor kind of faith. We may be convinced on such external grounds as the miracles and prophecies recorded in Scripture that the Scriptures are true, and yet be quite blind to the truth of the truths in Scripture—just as a man may be quite convinced on external evidence that Euclid is all true and yet not see the truth of a single proposition in Euclid. Arguments from miracles and prophecies may lead to the conclusion that the Gospel is not the work of man but the word of God, but as-

sent to that conclusion is not equivalent to faith in the Gospel as truth. Mysteries are doubtless involved in Christianity as in nature, but mysteries are no more the direct objects of Christian than of natural faith, and a "mystery" into which we could have no insight would be, as Lotze says, "a mere curiosity devoid of all connection with our religious needs, and, on that account, an unworthy object of revelation."

A faith in Christianity not resting directly on the knowledge of Christianity, but assuming that Christianity cannot, even when revealed and in so far as revealed, be directly known, and must consequently be rested on a knowledge of external incidents and testimonies, is in the main a blind faith, and every attempt to vindicate it as the true faith must base itself on the agnostic hypothesis that God's revelation of Himself and of the spiritual truth contained in it cannot be in themselves the proper objects of knowledge and experience. Such agnosticism underlay the evidentialist apologetic theology as a whole, and hence it is not without substantial reason that that theology has fallen largely into disesteem. If religious truths be accepted merely on the authority of the Bible, or merely on such external grounds as the miracles or prophecies therein recorded, they are not accepted by us as in themselves either really true or religious. To be apprehended and realised by us as properly religious truths, we must have a living insight into their nature and significance, and a veritable spiritual experience of their influence on our hearts and lives. Revelation, even at its highest, and taken in its strict-

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est sense, must be directly verifiable, otherwise it would be a revelation which did not reveal, and certainly a revelation which could not accomplish, those spiritual ends for the sake of which alone we can reasonably conceive a revelation to have been given.

## CHAPTER X

### AGNOSTICISM AS TO KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

#### I. A GLANCE AT THE HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

KNOWLEDGE and belief, although closely connected, are so far from being identical or equivalent that it is as necessary to treat of agnosticism with reference to knowledge of God as to treat of it with reference to belief in God.

In all the higher forms at least in which God has been the object of human thought He has been not merely believed in but believed to be known. A worthy faith in God is a self-consistent one, includes a feeling of certainty of knowing what and in whom it believes, and rests on the conviction of having an actual apprehension of God as the true God, the most real of beings. It is not to be understood as necessarily less than knowledge but as essentially more than knowledge, a thing of the heart and life as well as of the intellect. It is so that the truly religious man understands and appreciates it. He does not say of either the object or contents of his faith that he only believes that they are; does not feel his faith to be a *mere holding for true*, but, on the contrary, feels it to be *an actual holding of the truth and a living in the truth*. Even the faith that God is so apprehended and realised must be admitted to have been often very erroneous and defective, but

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it is always better than mere belief, a blind belief, a so-called faith wholly divorced from knowledge and practice.

It is now almost universally admitted that in no region of the earth and in no stage of human history have tribes of men been found wholly destitute of conceptions and beliefs of a religious kind. Wherever men have not been utterly debased, physically, intellectually, and morally, the visible and corporeal world has everywhere suggested to them some thoughts of the invisible and divine, and the experiences of life have always led them in some measure to realise the sort of dependence on a power or powers higher than their own which is what is distinctively called religious. From the earliest and lowest to the latest and highest stages attained by humanity in the course of its history man has never ceased to show himself conscious of the existence and operations of what transcends all that the senses can perceive or the mind clearly attain, and yet which is very near to him, with the approval or disapproval of which he is vitally concerned, and which he is bound to revere and worship.

Religion has passed through various stages and has assumed many forms. Its history has been, on the whole, a progressive self-revelation of God in, through, and to men,—an *itinerarium mentis in Deum*, or soul's progress towards God and in God. If of the three ultimate objects of knowledge,—self, the world, and God,—God be the Father of all selves and the Creator of all worlds, God-consciousness must be a more profound and comprehensive con-



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sciousness than either world-consciousness or self-consciousness, and theology must ultimately be a more fundamental and widely inclusive science than either cosmology or psychology. Neither matter nor finite minds have their origin or explanation in themselves. They have come from God, and to be comprehended aright must be seen in profounder and clearer views of God than men have yet attained.

“ Accender ne dovria piú il disio  
Di veder quella essenza, in che si vede  
Come nostra natura e Dio s' unio.”

—DANTE, *Par.*, c. ii. 40-42.<sup>1</sup>

Religion as a subjective fact, as what may be called piety, is man's realisation of his relatedness to what he apprehends as Divine. As such it should be of all frames and experiences of mind at once the most mysterious and the clearest, as also the most intimate, the most inspiring, and most regulative. It alike reaches to the deepest and rises to the highest level of human consciousness, and feels the giver and sustainer of it to be none other than the Divine itself. Religion as a historical phenomenon began like other historical phenomena. God begins at beginnings and brings to pass what can be made of them. He lays the foundations of things in the depths and builds upwards. Hence the early phases of religion, like those of morality, industry, government, and all the arts and sciences, are rudimentary. They are even apt to seem to us in all respects con-

<sup>1</sup> “ With greater ardour should we be incited  
To see that Essence, which revealed, will show  
How God and man in substance were united.”

—(Wright's tr.)

## PRIMITIVE RELIGIONS

temptible and unworthy of consideration. That, however, only shows how short-sighted men are apt to be, and how prone to overlook that beginnings should be viewed in relation to endings, and the seeds of things be judged of with reference to what grows out of them.

Men were the latest and most highly developed of living beings to appear on earth. They inhabited it long before the origin of civilisation or the commencement of historic time, and also, of course, long before the date assigned by the Church to the creation of the biblical Adam. The earliest traces of religion—those left by palæolithic and neolithic men—are of the rudest kind, and imply only conceptions of the supernatural akin to those of modern savages. Hence the history of religion is now generally recognised to have been, in the main, like the history of man himself, a progressive development throughout an enormous stretch of time. Very different opinions, however, are still held both as to its starting-point and as to the relative position of its stages. As to the starting-point, fetichism, totemism, folk-lore, ghost- or ancestor-worship, polytheism in its specific sense, pantheism, henotheism, monotheism, and primitive revelation have still each its advocates, none of whom have succeeded in establishing their favourite hypothesis. Nor has certainty or unanimity been attained as to the general order in which the ruder phases of religion have appeared. None of the ways, that is to say, in which the many forms of polytheism, understood in its wider or generic sense, have been arranged by anthropologists and comparative

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mythologists can be safely held to represent their real historical position and succession.

But even should there be no single progressive series of religions ascertained or ascertainable, there is nowhere a more amazing example of progress to be witnessed than in the history of religion. Wonderful as has been the progress of science from its beginnings to its present state, it is not more wonderful than has been the progress of religion. The intellectual and spiritual distance between what religion was at its lowest and what it is now in Christianity at its best is not less than the progress made in the course of the history of science. Nor is there any manifest likelihood that it will be otherwise in the future,—that religion will lag behind science or do lesser services to humanity than science in the future. The rudest kinds of idolatry are still represented on large spaces of the earth, but they are so rapidly giving way before monotheism, and especially before monotheism in its Christian forms, that if Christian Churches were only faithfully to carry out their Master's "great commission" all the exclusively polytheistic religions might give place to the worship and service of the one true God even in the course of the present century.

The polytheistic religions themselves, viewed as a whole, testify to the power of a consciousness of the Divine in human life. Even a polytheistic religion or polytheistic conception of God is better than no religion or conception of God. Polytheism in every form has in it some conception of God, some germ of religion, and in its various forms we see the phases of

## POLYTHEISMS

a religious progress. To have any apprehension at all of the superhuman and supernatural, any perception of the Divine and susceptibility to its influence, is for human life and history a most momentous fact and experience. It is man's first stepping-stone to higher things, that alone by which he can raise himself above himself and enter on a progressive course. Even the vaguest gropings of men in their lowest estate for the aid and friendship of invisible powers higher than their own are not to be despised. They were of the nature of religion, and the first motions towards what became the truest and best in religion. But the merely rudimentary polytheisms were vastly inferior to some of the developed polytheisms. Some of the latter implied comparatively high conceptions and ideals both of Deity and humanity. They may even, although they could only rule the mind in its youthful immaturity, have done more for the progress of humanity, through eliciting and stimulating the free and energetic exercise of men's faculties, than religions of a far more profound and serious character. The culture of Greece is the best vindication of the scheme of providence which included the religion of Greece. There have been times in the history of Christendom when highly cultured men could look back with longing to the days of Grecian polytheism. It was so at the Renaissance, when the most active minds of Europe sought in Hellenic paganism the freedom of spirit and enthusiasm which they could not find in medieval scholasticism. It was so even at the commencement of last century, when the cold orthodoxy and the pale

rationalism of his time led Schiller to attempt to replace religion by art, and drew from his discouraged heart such poems as *The Gods of Greece* and *Words of Wisdom*.

The idea of the Divine, however, to be found in even the highest forms of polytheism has been to such an extent outgrown that there is no need to dwell further on polytheism proper. Neither agnostics nor non-agnostics now feel the truth of their cause to depend on the truth or falsity of a merely polytheistic conception of Deity. They will alike readily acknowledge that whatever services polytheism in the strict and specific sense of the term may have rendered to mankind in the past, the conception of Deity on which it rests has ceased to be credible to the men of to-day, and can no longer satisfy the demands of either the intellect or the heart.

But there are worthier conceptions of the Divine than the polytheistic. There are, for instance, monistic conceptions of the Divine, superior to the merely polytheistic while inferior to a truly monotheistic conception. The ancient Egyptian religion, for example, rested on such a conception. Its origin is not disclosed by Egyptian history, was unknown to the Egyptians themselves, and is seemingly still unknown to the Egyptologists of to-day. There is neither adequate evidence that it was a degeneration from monotheism or at first properly monotheistic, nor, on the other hand, that its lowest elements were its oldest elements. It was the soul and life-blood of a civilisation probably much older than the Chinese and certainly older than the Hindu. It was an ex-

## ANCIENT EGYPTIAN RELIGION

tremely complex and enigmatic religion, but neither superficial nor unprogressive, and went on developing for thousands of years without losing its identity, left perhaps no attribute of God wholly unrecognised, and possessed great truths which it only too skilfully concealed from those deemed unworthy to receive them. In the Egyptian religious system all sorts of powers were deified. The natural powers were regarded as also divine powers, working visibly and physically in the aspects and agencies of the universe, yet in conformity to law, and with a religious and moral purpose. Further, the separate powers were felt not to be all powers, the particular deities not to be all that was divine,—and that feeling expressed itself sometimes in the attribution of all power to one particular god, and at other times in altogether overlooking the particular deities and personalising and glorifying the power of the powers, the gods in *the god*. The Egyptian religion was monistic as well as polytheistic, but not a monotheism, although so far tending to monotheism and at times strongly monotheistic in expression. It was a monism inclusive of polytheism and consistent with the utmost exaltation of particular gods; not monotheism which is essentially exclusive of polytheism and recognises only one god as truly God. Hence when the monistic element in it was developed the result was not monotheism but pantheism. It is rather to monism than to monotheism that nature-worship leads, and naturalistic monism fully developed is not monotheism but pantheism.

China has of all nations had the longest continu-



ous history, and throughout its whole history it has had a religion almost as peculiar as was that of Egypt, and one which, like that of Egypt, has been almost uninfluenced from without. Its simple and prosaic religion, however, is in character utterly unlike what that of Egypt was. For example, whereas the latter was an excessively priestly religion, one of the peculiarities of the former is that priests have had little, if anything, to do with either its development or its control. The Chinese religion is essentially an ethical and political religion, and has become what it is under the influence of sages and statesmen, of social reformers and political teachers, of whom the most honoured is Kong-tse (Confucius, *b. B.C.* 551 and *d.* 478),—who was no priest, prophet, or even philosopher, but simply a moral and political instructor of the purest Chinese type,—one who drew the wisdom which he imparted from what had been written before him in the books called *Kings* and from the precepts and examples of the wise rulers of the Wan Dynasty. The Chinese words *T'ien*, *Ti*, and *Shang-ti*, words as old as any that exist in the Chinese language, express the idea of the Divine which the Chinese have held throughout their whole known history, and perhaps far into prehistoric time. The fundamental characteristic of the Chinese religion is the indissoluble connection of invisible Deity with the visible heavens. In almost all religions God and the heavens have been closely associated. All the higher races of mankind have seen the glory of the Divine to be revealed in the face of the sky, but in China alone have God and the heavens never

## CHINESE IDEA OF THE DIVINE

ceased to be indissolubly connected, to be deemed inseparable and indivisible. Hence the Chinese have so conjoined them in their thoughts that God and heaven are practically identified, God not being a creator of heaven or distinct from heaven, and heaven not being merely the visible or material heaven. Accordingly what they regard as the Divine, the Supreme Reality, although so far conceived of as endowed with intellectual and moral qualities, is not, properly speaking, a person, but merely a force, which moves and acts throughout the universe as a sustaining and generative power, and as a principle of order and rationality to which individuals ought to conform their conduct, and by which especially the national life should be regulated, but which has neither true consciousness nor freedom, neither affection nor will, and consequently no care for individuals. Individuals, indeed, are not only not expected to worship, but are prohibited from worshipping, T'ien. The Emperor is alone deemed worthy to do so. The aspirations and adorations of the people may not ascend higher than the monarch himself, their deceased ancestors, and an indefinite number of elemental spirits of which they do not pretend to have much knowledge. With such a religion and the impersonal character of its Supreme Being the Chinese people cannot be otherwise than deplorably lacking as individuals in spiritual life, and as a nation socially and politically weak and unprogressive. Unfortunately it has none better. The Taoist religion which traces its origin to Lao-tse, an elder contemporary of Confucius, and the author of a mystical

little treatise, the *Tao-te-King*, rests on an even poorer basis than the Confucian, inasmuch as the Divine Personality is even less recognised in it. The word "Tao" has been variously rendered "reason," "nature," "way." What is denoted by it is not a personal intelligence but intelligence as a law, as an incomprehensible essence or agency, as being thought of as an energy which may assume an infinite variety of forms without ever truly declaring itself. To live conformably to it is regarded as the great moral law; and identification with it through the loss of personal existence is deemed the chief good. There is in China a third religion or so-called religion, one of foreign origin, Buddhism. It has necessarily failed, however, to supply the defects of the native religions, for although it presented a high moral ideal as exemplified in the character and life of Buddha it was agnostic in its teaching as to God, viewed all existence as irrational and vain, and virtually identified the chief good with an eternal extinction of consciousness. In all the three Chinese religions there is much to remind us of modern religious positivism. The Comtist religion is closely akin to them, especially to the Confucian. It would almost seem as if the trinity of the former, with its three members or hypostases—Space or the *Grand Milieu*, the World or *Grand Fétiche*, and Humanity or the *Grand Être*—had been borrowed from the Trinity of the latter—Heaven, Earth, and Man. That what is thus regarded in China as the Divine is so like the object of European positivist worship, deity without personality, without affinity with what is best in man, and

## BRAHMANISM

indeed almost a void, is what more than anything else explains the weakness and unprogressiveness of China. China converted to the service of the true God might perhaps, in the course of the present century, be the most powerful nation in the world.

The best example of a pantheistic monism is Brahmanism. It was preceded by and almost necessarily grew out of a naturalistic polytheism. It does great credit to the ability of the Hindu mind, and could only have resulted from the most profound and earnest meditations on the nature of existence, on the absolute spirit, on the relation of the infinite and finite, on reality and appearance, on life and death, on suffering and retribution. Also it has given rise to a vast and peculiar civilisation, to various systems of theology and philosophy, and to an abundant and remarkable literature. Hindu thoughts may yet have much to suggest to the European mind, and may yet considerably modify European views of religion, and even modify them for the better. On the whole, however, it has conspicuously failed to apprehend and realise that idea of the Divine on which alone an adequate religion can be founded. It conceives of the Supreme Being as so absolutely the One Being that all finite objects, finite minds, and finite interests are deemed illusions, and that not even moral distinctions are supposed to exist before Him. It denies to Him all the qualities which can only be found in a person, and indeed all definite attributes, and thus leaves as it were to His worshippers merely an empty abstraction, an infinite blank. A religion with such an idea of Deity not

only could not satisfy the common mind, but in order to retain any hold on it at all must make enormous and most inconsistent concessions to it. Hence the Brahmans had to capitulate to the lower castes of India, and to allow them to worship in cruel and immoral ways a host of contemptible and fantastic gods.

The Zoroastrian or Mazdean religion seems to have been the only properly speaking dualistic religion, and is certainly the best example of such a religion. It may fairly be allowed to have been kindred in spirit to the monotheistic or prophetic religions. Nothing of a strictly historical nature is known about its reputed founder, but it must have had many prophets, cannot have been the work of one man or even of one generation, but was obviously a religion which had passed through a long course of development from a naturalistic phase to an ethical dualism. Its two fundamental and most prominent ideas as to nature are the idea of a law in nature and the idea of a war in nature,—the idea of a law in nature because there is a serene and marvellous order there, and the idea of a war in nature because it contains powers which work for good and powers which work for evil, beings that benefit man and beings that injure him, creatures that are pure and creatures that are foul. The laws of nature, its order and harmony, and all things good and pure, have their origin in the Heaven God, the Supreme God, Ormuzd (Ahura-Mazdao, the "All-knowing God"), who sees everything, dwells in Light which is his body, and is at once Uncreated Light and the Uncreated Word. But over against Ormuzd stands Ahriman

## MAZDEISM

(Angro-Mainyu, "the smiting or destroying Spirit"), and he is a formidable foe even for Ormuzd, being uncreated by him, and himself endowed with creative power, so that to every good spirit he can oppose a corresponding evil one. Hence there has arisen a terrific war throughout the universe into which all nature has been drawn,—all that is good for Ormuzd and all that is evil for Ahriman. The war, however, is not a scene of mere confusion, nor is its result uncertain. On the contrary, it is one of order, of ever-advancing order, and is steadily becoming more clear and intelligible. The light which centres in Ormuzd is constantly gaining on the darkness, which, vanquished and always diminishing, flies with Ahriman. The issue of the struggle will be the complete triumph of Ormuzd and the manifestation of his absolute goodness. He undertook the war with the intention of saving his enemy, Ahriman; besought him to love the good and have pity on himself; and has sought his conversion ever since, and will finally attain it. Through Mithra—the sun-god and god of wisdom—he will enlighten the god of darkness and change him into a mighty angel of light. Ahriman, and those who have followed him, will be purified, redeemed, and reconciled to Ormuzd. Hell will cease to be. The close of the struggle will be the resurrection of the dead and the regeneration of the universe,—the advent of a kingdom in which there will be no impurity or unrighteousness. Mazdeism, with its recognition of the reverence due to the holy will of the good God, its belief in a kingdom of God, and its hope in the triumph of



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good over evil, had conspicuous merits as a religion, and afforded scope for a vigorous and manly virtue. It erred chiefly in confounding moral and physical good, moral and physical evil, in unduly extending the boundaries of evil, in exaggerating the power of the Evil One, and in attaching undue importance to ritualistic precepts and practices.

The highest stage of religious development is the monotheistic. There are three monotheistic religions. These are the Jewish, Christian, and Mohammedan, and only in them is belief in a plurality of gods entirely transcended. Merely speculative monism does not exclude polytheism. Pantheism can only command popular assent when supplemented by polytheism. It is, for example, the personal gods of Hindu polytheism, and not the impersonal principle of Hindu pantheism, that the Hindu people worship. No people can worship what they believe to be entirely impersonal.

What Jewish monotheism was we learn from the Old Testament. The idea of God is the central thought in the Old Testament. There the God of Israel is represented as the only true God, the Maker and Ruler of heaven and earth; as no mere essence or substance, or force or law, but a self, a person; as possessing all the characteristics of personality,—namely, life, knowledge, affection, will,—yet as possessing them without the limits or defects peculiar to created and finite beings. There, while to God is ascribed in common with man *intelligence or knowledge*, there are also ascribed to Him in contradistinction to man omniscience and perfect wisdom. There,

## JEWISH MONOTHEISM

while to God is ascribed in common with man *affection*, there is also ascribed to Him in contradistinction to man pure and perfect goodness. There, while to God is ascribed in common with man *will*, there are also ascribed to Him in contradistinction to man omnipotence, immutability, entire truthfulness, perfect and immutable rectitude, absolute moral purity. The view given of God in the Old Testament was a unique and unprecedented phenomenon in the history of humanity,—a view singularly comprehensive, sublime, and practical; one which rested not on speculation and ratiocination but on God's own self-manifestations of Himself to the spirits of men through His works and ways in nature, history, and spiritual experiences; one which, in spite of its simplicity, so exhibited the relationship of God to nature as neither to confound them like pantheism nor to separate them like deism, but combined both divine immanence and divine transcendence. Obviously such a representation and view of God was eminently fitted to call forth and sustain a living and personal faith; an essentially ethical, elevating, and hopeful faith in the Creator, Preserver, and Ruler of the world. The existence of utterances in the Hebrew Scriptures which show that Hebrew faith sometimes conceived of God very unworthily is no reason for our not acknowledging the general justice and grandeur of the view of God given in those Scriptures.

The God of the Old Testament is also the God of the New Testament. Christ and the Apostles accepted what Moses and the prophets had taught con-

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cerning God. They assigned to Him no other attributes than had already been assigned to Him. Like Moses, and the prophets also, they made no attempt formally to prove the existence or to define the nature of God, but spoke of Him either as from vision or from inspiration. Yet what they taught regarding God had both originality and importance. They made great innovations on the Old Testament doctrine. Thus there was in that doctrine a limitedness or particularism inevitable from the very nature of the connection between the revelation and a particular people chosen to be its channel and recipient which could only be transcended through the connection being broken. There was a real inconsistency between Jewish particularism and the universalism of the disclosure as to the nature of God which had been made to the Jews. Consciousness of the inconsistency could not fail to grow and spread; and it was desirable that it should, in order that the inconsistency might in due time be removed, as it was through the teaching and work of Christ and His followers. Gradually the idea of God was freed from the limitations attached to it by its connection with what was temporary in Judaism, and the world ripened for the reception of a universal religion and a universal morality in essential accordance with the character of God as the Father and King of all peoples. Further, there was in Judaism not only a particularism but also an externalism inconsistent with a satisfactory presentation of the nature of God. On priests and people there were imposed the strict observance of many positive laws and close attention

## THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD

to a very elaborate ritual. For that there were adequate temporary reasons. The law was designed to secure due reverence for Jehovah and to extend and deepen a sense of His sanctity. The ritual was full of instruction, and was an appropriate medium of prophecy to the spiritually-minded among His worshippers. But both law and ritual could be greatly abused, and largely were so. Neither was meant to be permanent. Only such a disclosure of the spirituality, holiness, righteousness, and love of God as was made through Christ could fully suffice. And in due time it was given.

What is central in the New Testament view of the Divine is the revelation through Christ of the love of God, of the Fatherhood of God,—a Fatherhood not merely of natural creation or national selection but of spiritual relationship,—of sympathy, mercy, and grace for every individual soul. On no other basis could a truly universal religion be built up. The Jews themselves had failed to distinguish between the temporary and the permanent in the dispensation under which they lived. Hence they were not, and indeed have not even yet become, a missionary people. They received proselytes, but did not seek to proselytise. It was the life, teaching, and death of Jesus which originated the greatest spiritual revolution in the history of the world. It was St. Paul, however, the great “Apostle of the Gentiles,” who practically initiated it, and with a success which all the world knows. And here I cannot refrain from quoting the words of a Jewish author resident in America, who has recently published a singularly

wise and delightful work, admirably fitted, I feel sure, to benefit both Jews and Christians. "It was Paul's broad cosmopolitanism that gave Christianity to the world. It was his far-seeing and high-thinking mind which enabled him better to appreciate the priceless value to humanity of the truths held sacred by, and confined to, the Jews. It was Paul's genius which conceived the idea of breaking away from the incrustated traditions of the Jew, and going forth to convert the Gentile; to give his strength and his heart, his mind and his soul to uplift his brethren outside of his faith, and to bring them nearer to the God of Israel. He saw clearly that the Jews were preaching universal truths, but made no effort to disseminate them. He realised that for the faith of his fathers to accomplish its high purpose there must be teaching and preaching among non-believers and in foreign lands; and so, alone and unaided except for the presence and help of God, he set out on his heroic task, preaching the beautiful Jewish utterances set forth by Jesus, whom he had accepted as their Master. Thus Paul began a missionary work that in time revolutionised the religious spirit of the world, and which is destined to continue moving onward so long as civilisation shall stand. The heathen world for centuries had been waiting for Paul's missionary work. Heathenism in all its various phases had utterly failed to satisfy the human hearts that were yearning and thirsting after a pure, lofty, and spiritual belief. The souls of men, through paganism and idolatry, had been deadened and their moral sense stunted. Their lives, from

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the cradle to the grave, were most selfish and thoroughly materialistic. Here was the long-sought-for spiritual balm brought to their very doors by Paul, who taught that the meanest among them had a soul which was precious in the eyes of the one and only God, who was above all and for all. It was Paul who was the first to give the heathen object-lessons of the Jewish spirit by his own unselfish life, and to teach, in the spirit of his Master, that love is greater than hate, that kindness, and forgiveness, and peace, and humility, must fill the human heart before happiness can be attained in this world or in the world to come.”<sup>1</sup>

The ancient Church, the Eastern Church, the Roman Catholic and the Protestant Churches, hold substantially the same doctrine regarding the nature, perfections, and operations of God.

That there is “one God and no God besides God” could not be more clearly and emphatically affirmed than it was by the founder of Mohammedanism, the latest of the three great monotheisms. Mohammed was passionately unitarian, and Mohammedanism has, on the whole, remained so. It is a religion far from as spiritually rich as either Judaism or Christianity; and its Bible, the Koran, however pure may be its Arabic, is certainly as regards contents far inferior to either the Old or New Testament. Yet Mohammedanism is one of the great religions of the world. It is an essentially earnest, honest, and reasonable religion; one very widely spread, one which

<sup>1</sup> *Jesus the Jew, and other Addresses*. By Harris Weinstock. Funk & Wagnalls Company, New York and London, 1902. Pp. 64, 65.



has assumed far more forms and shown far more vitality than is commonly supposed; one which has had many schools and sects, some dogmatic, others mystical, and others speculative. Mohammedanism has already, in the course of its history, done much for civilisation, learning, science, and art, and may do even more for them in the future. Although it sanctions polygamy, that mischievous and immoral institution is no more inseparable from it as a religion than it was from Judaism. The Koran—the Bible of Islam—emphatically asserts the omnipotence, omniscience, majesty, mercy, and sovereignty of God. It ascribes to the Divine Being perhaps every attribute ascribed to Him in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. It may justly be said to teach a harsh and repellent predestinarianism; but a predestinarianism of the same kind has been taught by many eminent Christian theologians and widely accepted by Christian men as enjoined in the Bible. The missionary zeal and the missionary success of Islam are undeniable. It has made hundreds of millions of converts and swept idolatry clean off a large portion of the earth. Very often, it must be admitted, the sword has been its chief instrument of conversion. That instrument Christians now deem themselves unwarranted to employ. But they did not always think so. Christianity was largely spread in Europe by force of arms. In the early half of the Middle Ages pious kings and emperors felt it to be their bounden duty to compel their heathen subjects to renounce idolatry. Mohammedans, Jews, and Christians may reasonably be expected to be

## DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

gradually drawn nearer to each other by what is common in their religions, and especially by the fundamental fact acknowledged by them all,—the fact that there is only one God, the author and preserver of the universe, the father, ruler, and judge of all mankind. The doctrine of the Trinity has hitherto been the chief barrier to their union and co-operation. The substantial truth of the doctrine is likely to be adhered to and acknowledged throughout Christendom, but the defects in its formulation may well become increasingly felt. The terms in which it was expressed by the Nicene Fathers in ecclesiastical Greek have no equivalents in popular speech, and are very abstruse and technical. The history of the doctrine is naturally, therefore, not yet ended. Indeed never since the Nicene age has theological thought been so actively and independently occupied with it as during the nineteenth century, especially in Germany. The results as yet attained cannot be said to have been either certain or accordant, but it may be hoped that such a finding will eventually be come to as will make it impossible for either Jew or Mohammedan to suppose that Christian Trinitarianism is Tritheism, or is in any respect inconsistent with the unity of God,—the oneness of the Divine.

Even so rapid a glance over the history of religion as has now been taken may show that man has everywhere in some measure been a religious being, feeling after God if haply he might find Him, and thinking, or at least imagining, himself to have in some degree found Him. Throughout the whole earth,

and at all stages of human history, men of all races in all conditions have not only been seeking the Divine but deeming that they had so far found it, and that it must be their duty and would be for their interest to act so and so with respect to it. Surely that fact itself, however,—one so comprehensive and so manifest,—makes it very unlikely that either atheism or antitheistic agnosticism can be true. That men have everywhere in some measure recognised the supernatural and superhuman, and have felt not only warranted but bound to worship it, and yet that there is nothing of the kind, and that all the hopes and fears, all the thoughts, feelings, and actions connected with it, and, in a word, all the experiences deemed religious, are mere illusions, must surely be a delusion such as only an abnormal mind can entertain. There is nothing to warrant it, nothing parallel to it, in either nature or history. The inconsistency of it with a reasonable or moral government of the world, with the rule of a Supreme Being or Divine Reason, is, of course, obvious.

A very rapid survey of the history of religion may further suffice to convince us that it has been, on the whole, a history of steady and comprehensive progress,—one which shows us a gradual widening, deepening, and enlightening of men's thoughts of the Divine from age to age. Looked at without prejudice, the history of religion shows us the same kind of progress in knowledge of God as the history of nature and the history of man show us in knowledge of their respective objects. Just as the investigation of nature and the study of man have always

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led to a fuller knowledge of nature and a more intimate acquaintance with man, so has the search after God been continually rewarded by a clearer apprehension of His character, works, and ways. Every real advance, indeed, of knowledge regarding any one of the three ultimate objects of knowledge tends to the advancement of knowledge of the others. Especially true is it that all progress in knowledge tends upwards and Godwards, seeing that it is in God that all else lives and moves.

Knowledge of God has not been the result merely of individual efforts. It is also the product of the collective spiritual work and experience of mankind. Gifted and inspired leaders of men have nowhere had greater influence on the minds of their fellows than in the sphere of religion, but even there they would have accomplished little if they had been without an appropriate social medium or if the minds of other men had been devoid of affinities to God akin to their own. The roots of the theism of to-day lay in the hearts of primeval men and are connected with all the religious faith of to-day. They made their presence known when the first human beings recognised that there was a being or beings higher than themselves and whom it became them to worship and please. In the very infancy of the human race men, it would appear, sought after what was higher than themselves, greater than all they saw, some supernatural and superhuman Being, to whom they should lift up their thoughts, imaginations, and affections, and to whom they "should stretch out their hands if haply they might find Him." Nor have

they except in comparatively rare and easily explicable instances ceased to do so. Humanity as a whole has continued steadily in the faith that more is to be known of Deity than has been known at any given time; and that faith has been a continuous source not merely of religious progress but of all progress. The idea of God accepted in the present day as its chief ruling idea is only explicable by the whole religious history of man which has preceded it and the whole religious nature of man which underlies that history.

So far, then, as history can testify to truth, the history of religion may reasonably be held to testify to the truth not merely of some idea of God but to the truth of the monotheistic idea. It is only in the monotheistic idea that the final stage of religious history can be regarded as attained. The chief religions of the world are the monotheistic religions. Those which come nearest to them are monistic. The history of religion viewed in its entirety implies that there is only one true God. That is the conclusion to which it has tended from the beginning, and in which alone can the entire nature of man find rest and satisfaction.

The monotheistic idea of the Divine is evidently superior to the merely monistic idea. The latter idea has two forms,—both of which are extremes, contrary and conflicting extremes,—materialism and pantheism. Materialism finds the ultimate explanation of things in matter, and therefore always so far idealises, glorifies, and deifies matter, yet also always and strongly tends to atheism. I have treated of it

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in so far as anti-theistic in my *Anti-Theistic Theories*.<sup>1</sup> For many minds pantheism is as fascinating as materialism is repellent. And it must be allowed to have some great merits. It is superior to materialism, to atheism, to polytheism, and even to the deism which not only distinguishes God from the world but separates and excludes Him from the world. It is much inferior, however, to a true theism. That also I hope to have shown in *Anti-Theistic Theories*.<sup>2</sup>

The three monotheistic religions in the main agree as to what the Divine is, and it is to be hoped that on that broad and solid basis their adherents may co-operate in building up the monotheism of the future. The time seems coming, and even rapidly coming, when practically all religions on earth will be monotheistic. The ideas of the Divine implied in the lower religions may justly be regarded as having been steps or stages towards the monotheistic idea, but they are superseded now, and all that was true or good in them will find its fruition in what is far truer and better. The Divine is not divided or divisible. It is one, and it comprehends and unifies all that is real, and true, and good. Hence it is only the monotheistic idea of the Divine that requires to be defended against agnostic attacks. That idea is the highest and most comprehensive to which the human mind has attained. It is the apprehension alike of the Absolute of Philosophy and of the Infinite Personal God of Theism.

<sup>1</sup> *Lectures*, ii.-iv., pp. 39-75, and *Notes*, iii.-xix., pp. 450-504.

<sup>2</sup> *Lectures*, ix., x., pp. 536-554.



# AGNOSTICISM AS TO KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

## II. IN WHAT SENSES KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IS NOT ATTAINABLE

There are some significations of the term "knowledge" in which men cannot claim to have a knowledge of God. It is necessary to indicate what these significations are. That I shall now endeavour to do.

I. One is that man's knowledge of God is not, and cannot be, a comprehensive or exhaustive knowledge. As in all other respects so in regard to knowledge man is a very limited creature, closely related to the higher apes, and the inhabitant of a planet which is a very small part of God's vast universe. He knows neither the extent nor the depths of God's ways. He cannot measure the immeasurable, or find out the Almighty unto perfection. The greatest of his species, far from having a comprehensive knowledge of God even yet, know, as in the age of Job, only a small part of His ways, and that little superficially. Whoever seeks sincerely and earnestly to know God may hope for an unending progress in the knowledge of Him, but he cannot reasonably hope to attain a complete comprehension of Him. Mystery will never be eliminated from theology. The theology which fails to recognise the existence of mystery cannot be much worth studying.

While a comprehensive knowledge of God, however, is beyond human attainment, no one is entitled to say, or justified in thinking, that God is *incomprehensible in Himself*. We have no right to include, as has been often done, incomprehensibility among the attributes of God. God is not incomprehensible

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*in Himself*, for He is not incomprehensible *to Himself*. God is light, and in Him there is no darkness, no ignorance, at all. The Divine incomprehensibility is not an attribute of the Divine nature itself, but a relation of the Divine nature to our minds. Were God in any wise incomprehensible to Himself His knowledge would be limited. God Himself alone can be the adequate object of His own infinite mind, and His omniscience can only be strictly infinite if He know perfectly not only the universe but His own infinite self. But He necessarily is, and must for ever be, incomprehensible to us. We cannot know Him as He knows Himself and knows us. We cannot know Him as we can know what is finite; as we know a proposition in geometry; as we know an effect when we are thoroughly acquainted with its causes. We can only have a limited and apprehensive knowledge of Him derived from His manifestations of Himself to us in His works and ways, and the more we acquire of such knowledge of Him the more we shall feel how utterly a comprehensive knowledge of Him is beyond us. It is not by ignorance of God that a due sense of His incomprehensibility by us is produced in us, but by such knowledge of Him as is all we can attain. The more we learn to know of Him the more conscious we must be of His unknowableness to us. If every real addition to our knowledge of any department or portion of God's universe be, as it indubitably ever is, a new disclosure to us of the extent of our ignorance, still more does that hold true of every addition to our knowledge of God Himself.

In so far as agnosticism warns or constrains us to feel the littleness and limitations of our knowledge of God, and His necessary and infinite transcendence of our highest thoughts, so far it does us an important service. In much of our theology and still more of our popular religious opinion His transcendence of all human intelligence is too plainly forgotten and ignored, to the great detriment of the reverence and humility which are His due. So long as men conceive of God as essentially such an one as themselves, as a kind of vastly magnified man, or, in other words, so long as they conceive of Him in the coarse, definite, familiar fashion still common among us, will agnosticism, even in exaggerating our ignorance of the Divine, have an important lesson to teach us, a needed spiritual purpose to serve in the world.

II. There is another signification of the term knowledge in which we are not entitled to claim a knowledge of God. We cannot have what is called by certain philosophers and theologians an absolute knowledge of God—a knowledge of Him as purely and entirely in what they are pleased to call “in Himself.” We have no such knowledge of any real being. All our knowledge is relative, and generally even very defective and shallow. We must be content to know God as He has revealed Himself in His works and ways, in physical nature, the minds of men, and the histories of nations. If we are foolish enough to hope to know Him aloof from and out of all relation to any determinate mode of existence of His own, to our faculties, or to other beings, our

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hope must be in vain. Not a few philosophers and theologians have written and spoken much about such knowledge of God,—knowledge of God as what they arbitrarily call the Absolute. Every word, however, spoken or written on the assumption of the attainability of such a knowledge of God has no practical bearing whatever on the question as to whether or not we can know God in any reasonable sense,—whether or not we can know Him as we know everything else that we really know.

To be unable to know God out of all relation, that is, apart from His attributes, apart from His created universe, apart from His dealings with mankind, apart from our own power of knowing Him, need not be felt by us as any privation at all. A God without attributes—a God with nothing to distinguish Him from any one or anything else—a God out of all relations—is no God at all. To say of God that we do not know what He is in Himself apart from His attributes and relationships is merely to say of Him what we must say of every other being or thing. It is only as possessed of qualities that any being exists or acts. No man has the slightest knowledge even of his own nature apart from its powers, properties, and affections. Nay, more, take these away, and you take away at the same time his nature and leave nothing. So of God. We cannot know the “God in Himself” of sundry sages and divines, for the simple but sufficient reason that there is no such God to know. There is no God without powers, affections, attributes, relationships; and when viewed in these—in His omnipotence and

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omniscience, His holiness and love, His Creatorship, Fatherhood, or Sovereignty—He is viewed “in Himself,” in the only true and reasonable sense,—that is, as distinct not from His own characteristics, but from other beings.

The sole practical result, it seems to me, of the elaborate reasonings of Sir William Hamilton and Dean Mansel on the Absolute and the Infinite was just to show us that if we are foolish enough to try to conceive of God in the absurd way to which I have referred,—if we start with a notion of “God-in-Himself” as vain as Kant’s “thing-in-itself,” identify that notion with the Absolute or the Infinite, and reason on it as if it were real and intelligible,—we must inevitably involve ourselves in endless confusion and contradiction. That may well seem a small result to have been gained by so enormous an expenditure of logical energy, and might surely have been got with less trouble. Still we must accept it with thankfulness. Certainly we should be careful to think of God, or the Absolute, or the Infinite, in a way quite otherwise than that against which Hamilton and Mansel argued, while strangely supposing it the only way in which we could think of Him. Let us try to think of God only in a way in which there is reasonableness and reality, and not identify Him in our thoughts with any absurd abstraction, any mere idol of the intellect.

III. There is a third sense in which we ought not to claim ability to know God. We are not to assume that we can have an apprehension of God indepen-

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dent of His own manifestation of Himself to us. We can know God not only because He is but because He makes Himself known to us. He is only known to us so far as self-revealed to us. The grounds, or evidences, or proofs of the legitimacy of our belief in God are His own manifestations. If so, it follows that in affirming man may know God we are not arrogating to the finite human mind a power so extraordinary as to be incredible. We claim to know God only through the help of God. Our knowledge of Him is derived from Himself, and hence to know Him shows not so much the power of the finite to reach the Infinite as the power of the Infinite to reach the finite.

But if it be so, how stands it with the agnostic denial of man's ability to know God? Plainly thus: it means not only what it directly asserts, namely, that man cannot know God, but also, by necessary implication, God's inability to make Himself known to man. Both assertions, however, are extremely rash, and the agnosticism which takes upon itself the responsibility of defending them would require to be a very "learned ignorance" indeed,—an *ignorantia doctissima* possessed of a vast if not infinite knowledge.

Man cannot know God: that is what the non-theistic agnostic says. He does not deny that there is a God. He does not assert that the idea of a God is irrational and self-contradictory, so as to entitle him to disbelieve and deny that there is a God. What he says is, whether there be a God or not, man cannot know that there is a God,—even if there be



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a God it is impossible for man to know His existence. But even that assumes a kind of knowledge of the limits of knowledge which ought not to be *assumed* to be either attained or attainable. For, as I have already had to show, while there is no reason to doubt that we may discover *internal limits of human knowledge* in the conditions and laws to which the human intellect must conform if it would attain knowledge, there is great reason for doubting our ability to discover the *external limits of knowledge*,—the boundaries which separate things knowable from things unknowable. To lay down that this or that thing—this or that proposition—which involves no contradiction, which is not intrinsically irrational, can never be known, never be proved, is an act of an agnosticism closely akin to an audacious dogmatism. A finite mind like that of man has no right to assign fixed objective limits to its capability of knowing; no right to assume that any reality is utterly unknowable,—that between existence and knowledge there is anywhere an impassable barrier or chasm. By doing so it arrogates to itself a superhuman knowledge of its own possible attainments. Its seeming modesty is actually, although unconsciously, real pretentiousness.

As already indicated, however, there is still more in the agnostic denial that man can know God. There is implied that even if God exists He cannot make Himself known to man. The agnostic, therefore, in the very act of denying that God can be known, virtually affirms that he himself knows what God cannot do; that he knows the limit of the power

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of self-revelation which an Infinite God could possess; that he knows that even an Infinite Being could not make known His own existence to His own creatures. Such agnostic atheism seems to be identical with atheistic agnosticism, or, in other words, to be a manifest self-contradiction. Things are not always what they seem. Under the seeming pride of the claim to know God there may be present only a humble ascription to God of the power to teach us to know Himself. Under the seeming humility of the declaration God cannot be known there lurks the audacious affirmation that a finite mind can trace the limits of infinite intelligence and power.

### III. AGNOSTIC POSITIONS RELATIVE TO KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

I would now proceed to consider the chief agnostic positions which have been held regarding knowledge of God.

I. First, then, there is the position that knowledge of God, and religious knowledge generally, is only to be attained through special revelation. The holders of that position are obviously agnostics with reference to some of the sources of religious knowledge. They overlook or refuse to regard nature, mind, and history as media through which God makes Himself known, and contend that special revelation is the only medium through which we can become cognisant of Him. And there have been many such agnostics. Their agnosticism is of a kind which has shown itself more or less in all stages of Christian thought and theology. The theology even of the

early Christian teachers included what we should call *natural theology*, but it was, mainly at least, drawn not directly from nature but from the Old Testament, supplemented by the views of Greek and other sages who had been favoured with some knowledge of a primitive revelation. That it should have been so is easily explicable, and indeed was inevitable, but a dangerous illusion was implied which gave rise in course of time to an incalculable amount of mischief. The teachers of the Church in forming their views of the universe and of God as revealed therein gave to Scripture the primary place and to Nature only a secondary place, and deemed themselves bound in all cases of apparent conflict to prefer the former to the latter—*i.e.*, the words written in human speech to the very Divine realities to which the words referred.

Hence men were for ages led to neglect the direct study of nature and history, and to accept as truths supernaturally revealed in Scripture, and which could not be called in question without impiety, all sorts of pseudo-scientific notions and hypotheses. Hence also that long and deplorable war between superstition and reason which is so often most erroneously represented as the conflict of religion and science, and in which every seeming victory of the former was necessarily a real defeat.

Luther and a number of the reformers ascribed to Scripture a position inconsistent with an adequate recognition either of the rights of reason or of the divine instructiveness of creation, providence, and man's own body and spirit. Faustus Socinus, the

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founder of Socinianism, however, was perhaps the first among Protestants to represent men as wholly dependent upon Scripture for the knowledge of God. He denied that there was any natural religion, and traced all religious beliefs and practices to special revelation as their source.

So late even as the eighteenth century there was in England a theological school of considerable influence which maintained that the Bible was the one sure source of scientific truth; that the only trustworthy Natural Philosophy must be drawn from the Divine disclosures made to Adam and Moses. It was named from its founder the Hutchinsonian school, and among its most zealous members were learned divines belonging to Oxford and Cambridge, such as Bishop Horne of Norwich, Jones of Nayland, and Drs. Bate and Parkhurst. Even so sagacious a man as President Forbes of Culloden was attracted by Hutchinson's system, and gave a very favourable account of its principles in a pamphlet published anonymously at Edinburgh in 1736 and entitled *A Letter to a Bishop concerning some important discoveries in philosophy and theology*. According to the Hutchinsonians men are dependent on the Bible not only for spiritual guidance but also for a knowledge of the fundamental principles of all true science and philosophy. To "Newton's Principia" they opposed what they called "Moses's Principia." The former they regarded as thoroughly false, and also as materialistic and atheistic in tendency. Hence they resisted the spread of the Newtonian philosophy in England, and opposed it even more bitterly than did the Car-

tesians. Moses's Principia, they held, alone contained a true science of nature, and that science must be drawn directly and exclusively from the pure, primitive, unpointed Hebrew text of Scripture. Their whole system was founded on the assumptions that the Hebrew Bible without points is perfect; that all Hebrew root-words have definite and profound meanings which were originally communicated by God to Adam in paradise and afterwards redelivered to Moses in the wilderness; and that the only true natural philosophy must be educed from the pure and authentic Old Testament text. Such assumptions happily require no refutation in the present day.

Dr. John Ellis published in 1743 a treatise entitled *The Knowledge of Divine Things from Revelation, not from Reason or Nature*, of which a 2° ed. appeared in 1771 and a 3° ed. in 1811. The way in which he there deals with reason and nature as related to religion is entirely agnostic. He recognises no disclosures of God in nature. He represents reason as limited in its operations exclusively to the objects of sense. He holds that but for revelation man could form no conception whatever of the Divine Being, or of any spiritual realities, relations, or obligations. The same views were adopted by Archbishop Magee of Dublin, famed for his work on *The Scripture Doctrines of Atonement and Sacrifice*, and by the Wesleyan Methodist divine, Dr. Richard Watson, still more famed for his *Theological Institutes*. Were it not for their faith in revelation those pious Christian men would have been as much sceptics and agnostics as David Hume himself. Their faith in an

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oral or written revelation saved them from that fate, but, assuming as it did reason to be occupied entirely with sense and nature, to be in no respect a spiritual revelation, it was necessarily an inconsistent and unreasonable faith.

There is no need in the present day to dwell on the refutation of a doctrine so strangely narrow, so obviously unreasonable. God's revelation of Himself is not confined to a book. The soul is itself a revelation of God. Creation is the manifestation of God in space. History is the manifestation of Him in time. The whole wondrous universe around us, full of His works, ruled by His laws, mirroring His perfections, is a revelation of Him made to the eyes and ears, hearts and minds, of men,—a revelation which lies open before all human beings, and which has taught almost all human beings something of God. Yet, notwithstanding that, because God has given us a special revelation of Himself in a historical form, and a Book from which we may derive special instruction as to what that revelation is, some learned and pious men have been found to deny that God is elsewhere or otherwise to be apprehended than through the words of that Book. A clearer proof there could not be that even the devout Protestant divine may fall into a sort of fetich-worship, and sacrifice all other sources of Divine truth and knowledge to the one which he has idolised. The apostolic advice, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols," was not of merely temporary application, and should, oftener than it has been, be taken to themselves by theologians and the clergy.



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There is no excuse for such Bibliolatry as I have referred to in the Bible itself. There is no narrowness or exclusiveness or agnosticism there. The Bible is constantly pointing us to God's disclosures of Himself in nature and history, in the control of human life, and in the direction of the movements of the human heart. It appropriates on every page the teachings of the oldest and most comprehensive revelation of God,—the universe itself. The teaching of the Bible in this connection cannot be better summarised than in its own words,—“the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead.”

II. A second agnostic position as regards knowledge of God is that of those who grant in words that we can know God, yet who so describe what they call knowledge of God as to eviscerate it of much, if not all, of its natural and proper meaning, and leave practically little or no real distinction between knowing God and not knowing Him.

That position was not quite unknown even in the early Christian Church. To many of its teachers the revelation of God in Christ as set forth in Scripture came home with an intensity of conviction that made them deem all attempts at a reasoned knowledge of the Divine existence, nature, and attributes needless and futile. They further so emphasised the transcendence, the incomprehensibility, the ineffableness of God as to be suspicious of all definite thought or speech concerning Him, and hence gave utterance to many apparently agnostic statements regarding

man's knowledge of God. There followed in the same track some of the later Christian fathers and many of the medieval schoolmen, whose views of a *docta ignorantia* were accepted and developed into a form of philosophy by Sir Wm. Hamilton and Dean Mansel.

A quite distinct and definite example, however, of the kind of agnosticism to which I refer may, perhaps, be correctly held to have only made its first appearance in the eighteenth century, when a very learned and able Irish prelate, Archbishop King, published a work entitled *Divine Predestination consistent with the Freedom of Man's Will* (1709). He there maintained that all the attributes of God designated by the names of human characteristics are of a nature wholly different from those of man, and that the latter are, in fact, mere analogies or emblems of the Divine attributes. And obviously if he could have made out his contention to that effect he would have gone far to prove his thesis. At least he would have shown that it was impossible to say what divine predestination, or anything divine, was or was not consistent with. Another Irish prelate of the same period, Bishop Browne, so far followed the lead of the Archbishop, but did not go quite so far. In two treatises—respectively entitled *The Procedure, Extent, and Limits of Human Understanding* (1728), and *Things Supernatural and Divine conceived by Analogy with things Natural and Human* (1733)—he modified the doctrine of King, without, however, substantially altering it. Bishop Berkeley had more perspicacity. He saw that such teaching was radi-

cally erroneous and inevitably tended to complete theological scepticism. Hence he made a powerful and essentially just attack, or rather series of attacks, on it, as being an implicit denial of Deity and His attributes, a wholly unintelligible view of what was meant by them. He conjoined therewith his celebrated and richly suggestive hypotheses of *universal immaterialism* and of *symbolism*. His views on the subjects referred to were intimately connected in the mind of Berkeley and presented with wonderful skill and attractiveness, but they are not necessarily interdependent. One may be taken and another left.

In the German Post-Kantian schools of philosophy and theology there has been much religious agnosticism of the kind to which I refer. For that Kant and Schleiermacher were both in no small measure responsible. Romanticism also greatly aided. It was the social medium most favourable for the growth and spread of religious agnosticism, symbolism, and the like. Schelling by his lectures and Creuzer by a very learned and original work (*Symbolik u. Mythologie der alten Völker*, 1812-15) made Mythology a favourite study of the romanticists, and the most generally accepted explanation of it the theory that religion originated in a primitive revelation the content of which was too profound for ordinary men either rightly to apprehend or accurately to retain, and therefore that there naturally arose a priestly caste which, in order to preserve the message of revelation from being altogether lost, was led to invent and to communicate to the people "myths" which were not themselves direct expres-

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sions of religious truths but *symbols of such truths drawn from physical nature*. Many other scholars followed them on that agnostic path. At the same time Apelt, Fries, De Wette, and other philosophers drew a sharp distinction between religious knowledge and ordinary or theoretic knowledge. To the former they ascribed only an imaginative or æsthetic value. Thus the mythologists and philosophers referred to co-operated in introducing a theological agnosticism.

The Ritschlian divines of to-day are still on the same path,—one which, to make use of Carlyle's phrase, "leads painfully no-whither." They represent religious knowledge as consisting merely of *value-judgments* while other knowledge consists of *existential judgments*, or, in equivalent terms, the former as resting on what is *spiritually helpful* while the latter is composed of *affirmations ascertained to be really true*. The most distinctive feature of the Ritschlian theology is its claim to be independent of philosophy, free from all contamination of metaphysics, separate from all natural knowledge, drawn exclusively from the revelation of God in Christ. The legitimacy of Natural Theology is denied. No recognition of any revelation of God is granted except that in Scripture, and only there in so far as there is the revelation of God in Christ. Theology is represented to be incapable of attaining to any theoretic knowledge of God, and to have to do only with what God is felt to be in the religious experience of the Christian. That is to say, it is described as having for its task to set forth regarding God not theoretical but practical judgments,—not affirma-

tions which really apply to God in Himself but affirmations which tell us what He is *worth to us*—i.e., *value-judgments*, which although they in no way express what God really is, may enable us to overcome the evil in the world and to lead a Christian life.

Such a foundation is surely a very strange one on which to attempt to raise a Christian theology,—one as insecure as could well be chosen,—one anti-scientific and anti-rational to the very core. The claim made for itself by the Ritschlian theology is like that of a physics which demands independence of mathematics, or of a chemistry which refuses to recognise the laws of physics. The vanity of its pretension to independence of philosophy is seen in the fact that the claim itself has no other basis or support than an unsound philosophy. It rests wholly on agnosticism as to reason and on the Kantian reduction of religion to a mode of representing the moral ideal. It assumes that Kant's philosophy as modified in certain respects by Lotze is the basis of theology. But that is an enormous assumption were it only because of the immense amount of epistemology and metaphysics presupposed under the pretension that theology is independent of, and distinct from, philosophy. True, Ritschl fancied that what he took from Kant and Lotze was merely a theory of cognition; but therein he greatly erred, for the epistemology of both Kant and Lotze was at every step also a metaphysics,—a series of affirmations or negations as to all categories of ultimate thinkable things, from empty space and time to the *ens realissimum*. A theologian who assumed the truth of the Kantian

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epistemology as modified by Lotze had no more right to regard his theology as independent of philosophy and metaphysics than another who assumed the truth of the dialectic system which Hegel sought to substitute for the Kantian criticism.

That Ritschl and his followers should have sought to keep clear of philosophy was natural enough. Philosophy seeks truth. Theology, in the view which they have given of it, really does not. It has not to deal with truth at all but with judgments of value, —with conceptions which have the merit, whether they be true or false, of helping us to overcome the temptations of the world and to attain the ethical goods of life. A system of that kind, one which is content with merely subjective satisfaction and indifferent to truth, is of its very nature hostile to philosophy, and quite consistently pretends, as Ritschlianism has so often done, that theology is indifferent to the truth or falsehood of philosophy, and that what is called true in theology is not to be rejected because it may be found false in philosophy or in any of the branches of inquiry which aim at the discovery of truth. A judgment of value, a so-called theological truth, may accordingly be a real, a philosophical, a historical, a scientific falsehood. Thus it may be quite justifiable as a demand of religion to affirm the legitimacy of faith in Christ as God, although outside of religion it may be quite certain that Christ was merely a man concerning whom it is very difficult to know accurately what He either said or did; and incumbent on every Christian to hold to the belief that Jesus rose from the dead,



although it must seem to him as a scientist altogether untenable. Faith, that is to say, must compel the Christian man to regard as a truth what his reason assures him to be a falsehood.

Surely such book-keeping by double entry can only lead to bankruptcy of faith or reason or both. There is no warrant for it. The mind of man is not naturally or necessarily self-contradictory. There is no essential antagonism between theoretical and practical judgments—judgments of truth and judgments of value—possible. On the contrary, the latter imply the former. Judgments true in theory are never false in practice, and judgments true in practice are never false in theory. Any judgment which is untrue has no value. Luther, in some of his rashest moments, expressed himself as if he had adopted the most immoral and irrational tenet of medieval sophistry,—the tenet of a twofold truth, or that what is true in philosophy may be false in theology, and *vice versâ*. But surely it is rather an extravagant homage to his memory to choose just that piece of portentous folly as the very cornerstone of a theological system. Truth is one and can never be divided against itself. What is true in any one province of inquiry or of experience will be found to be in harmony with all that is true in every other.

The author, however, who presented the form of religious agnosticism under consideration in its most attractive light was not a German but a French theologian, the late Professor Auguste Sabatier. In 1892-93 he published in the *Revue de Lausanne* and

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the *Revue Chretienne* an *Essai d'une theorie critique de la connaissance* which now forms, with some alterations, the last chapter of his *Esquisse d'une philosophie de la religion d'après la psychologie et l'histoire*, 1897. With great apparent lucidity and in a most charming style he there presented what he called "the critical theory of knowledge." As regards substance or content the theory was largely of German origin, but as regards form it was exquisitely French, and as regards spirit no one could for a moment doubt the religious sincerity of its advocate or the warmth of his piety. But unfortunately the foundations of his theory were untrustworthy, and the chief propositions composing it grave errors. His psychology, too, was as poor and misleading as that of Ritschl, which is saying a great deal. Accordingly the eloquence which he employed in the advocacy of his views could not conceal their self-contradictoriness and superficiality, as was speedily made manifest by the criticisms of MM. Godet, Berthoud, Ch. Bois, Doumergue, Pillon, and other French and Swiss authors. The most thorough refutation of them, however, was the *De la connaissance religieuse* (1894) of M. Henri Bois, professor of theology at Montauban. It has a keenness and completeness which reminds one of John Locke's controversial writings at their best, and also contains very thorough discussions of a positive character as to the nature and genesis of religious and scientific knowledge, evolution, empiricism, and a priorism, dogma and fact, revelation and authority. M. Bois seems to have neither overlooked nor spared any-

thing which is ambiguous or erroneous in M. Sabatier's teaching, and to have left very little, if anything, at once new and true, to be gathered by any one coming after him. I refer, therefore, those of my readers who have perused M. Sabatier's work to the much more accurate and profound treatise of M. Bois, and content myself with a mere indication of the three chief errors of Sabatier as to the nature of religious knowledge.

1°. M. Sabatier not only distinguished natural and religious knowledge from each other, but severed them from each other and contrasted them as wholly unlike orders of knowledge. He did not go so far as to represent them as wholly unrelated, but he represented them as essentially different in nature and kind. Therein he erred. Religious knowledge so far as merely knowledge is not essentially unlike but essentially like other knowledge. It differs from other knowledge not in so far as it is knowledge but inasmuch as it has another object than other knowledge. But, of course, the difference of the object, and of its relations and manifestations to the subject, naturally imply corresponding differences in the knowledge. Every kind of knowledge which has a specific object must be so far different from every other kind of knowledge. And as the object of religious knowledge, God, is a unique object, religious knowledge must be also so far unique. More than any other kind of knowledge the knowledge of God implies on the part of man not merely the exercise of the faculties of the intellect, but also the culture of all the good qualities of the heart, and the right

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application of all the energies of the will. Man alone among earthly creatures has been made in the image of God, and therefore he alone among them can know God. Through mere intellectual exertion man can neither acquire a spiritual knowledge of God nor the saving faith which is conjoined with it. "With the heart man believeth unto salvation." "God is love," and as love can only be apprehended aright by love, an honest and good will is absolutely essential to a true knowledge of God, and of God's self-manifestations. "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God."

2°. Sabatier further represented scientific knowledge or knowledge of nature as always objective, and religious knowledge or knowledge of God as always subjective. The object of the former he held to be always outside the *ego*, and so to be known as independent of the action or disposition of the subject. The object of the latter he held to be always within the *ego*, and known as belonging to the *ego*. "A thinking and acting subject is, he admits, no doubt necessary in making science, but the characteristic of science is nevertheless to see what it studies apart from the subject, apart even from the psychical phenomena that he observes in the *ego* itself. Religious knowledge, on the other hand, he held to have no object or phenomenon that may be apprehended outside the *ego*,—none at least which is not immanent in the subject itself and only reveals itself in the personal activity of that subject. There again, however, M. Sabatier erred. Religious knowledge is no more merely subjective than merely objective.

No kind of knowledge is either merely subjective or merely objective. Even self-knowledge is knowledge of a self as object by itself as subject. It is only so that either self-consciousness or self-introspection is realisable, or even conceivable, as a psychological fact or process. So regarded, self-knowledge is as truly knowledge, and may be as trustworthy a foundation for science, as perception and the methods of research employed in the physical sciences. Suppress, however, either subject or object, and there remains no possibility of any kind of science. To affirm, as M. Sabatier did, that the object of scientific knowledge is always outside the subject, and that consequently physical science is exclusively objective knowledge, is unjust to mental science, and not true as regards the physical sciences, not one of which is wholly free from subjectivity, or can be so unless Kant's *Ding an sich* be a reality. But Sabatier himself pronounced the *Ding an sich* both a non-being and non-sense. *Das Ding an sich*, he said, *ist ein Unding*. Thereby, however, he rejected what could alone serve as the corner-stone of his own theory. His denial of the *Ding an sich* was implicitly equivalent to the affirmation that even physical science could not possibly become exclusively objective. All scientific knowledge, from the mere fact of its being knowledge acquired by selves with self-consciousness, with sensations, perceptions, judgments, volitions of their own, is in a large measure subjective, and cannot be otherwise. And no religious knowledge is merely subjective, because its object—God—can never be reasonably regarded as wholly identical

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with, or wholly immanent in, the piety of human souls, human selves. God is not to be found merely, as Sabatier most unfortunately suggested, in the piety of His worshippers, in the feelings of subjective life. Piety should recognise God not only in its own often very dubious and superficial self, but in all the Divine works and dispensations as well. What Sabatier says, "to know the world as an astronomer is not to know it religiously," is indeed so far true; but not less true was the saying of the poet, "the undevout astronomer is mad." "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handywork." "The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made."

3°. Sabatier has drawn another distinction between scientific and religious knowledge. Scientific knowledge he characterised as *mechanical*, and religious knowledge as *teleological*, or, in what he regarded as equivalent terms, the former as concerned with *efficient causes* (*causes proper*), and the latter with *final causes* (or *ends*). At the same time he admitted that *mechanism* and *teleology* do not exclude, but imply each other; that "cause" and "end" are two aspects of the same conscious act, and are imposed on our understandings with an equal necessity. There is, therefore, no need for dwelling on the distinction referred to. On M. Sabatier's own showing there is no essential antagonism between theological and physical science. Each is a needed supplement to the other. So far from causality and finality excluding each other, there can be no complete and



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satisfactory knowledge which is not comprehensive of both. God is at once the first and the final cause of all that is.

4°. The last distinction drawn by M. Sabatier between religious and scientific knowledge seems to the present writer to be seriously erroneous. He has represented the former as able only to express itself in metaphors or symbols, and the latter as constantly employing terms equivalent to its conceptions and conclusions. Religion is therefore of the nature of feeling and imagination, but not of intelligence and objective reality; of art and phantasy, not of reason and well-grounded experience. With eloquence, warmth, and sincerity he has written of knowing God, and has attributed to God power, wisdom, righteousness, goodness, and love. Nevertheless he has maintained, or rather taken for granted as if self-evident, that our knowledge of God is only metaphorical, or analogical, or symbolical. Hence he has been forced at this stage of his theorising constantly to employ the equivocal and misleading language of agnosticism; both to affirm that we know God and to deny that we know Him as He really is; both to ascribe and deny to Him attributes akin to ours; to grant to the ear that God is knowable, but to deny it to the mind and heart. Thus to profess to know God, and at the same time to represent God as the unknown and unknowable subject of unknown and unknowable attributes, is far from consistent. If we can have no actual apprehensive knowledge of God as well as of man, neither can we have any right to pronounce that there is any resemblance or analogy

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between them, or to represent anything as even metaphorical or symbolical of a God wholly unknown. We cannot know what a symbol is unless we know that of which it is a symbol. When I am told in the first psalm, for example, that the godly man shall be "like a tree planted by the rivers of water," &c., in order to understand that metaphorical or symbolical language I must be acquainted both with what is implied in the growth and flourishing of a tree, and what are the conditions and characteristics of the development and prosperity of spiritual life in the soul. If righteousness and love mean something wholly different in kind in God from what is meant by them in man, they may be as like our wickedness and hate as our righteousness and love; in fact, it must be impossible for us to say what they are either like or unlike. Besides, if righteousness and love or any of God's attributes which we profess to know are thus unlike in kind to any righteousness and love of which we have experience, how do we know the so-called Divine righteousness and love? Only, one would think, from the righteousness and love of which we have experience. Yet how can they be connected with a righteousness and love wholly different from them in kind? No inference will connect them. Any argument which can be formed to link them together must be a fallacy,—a syllogism of four terms. The view, then, with which I have been dealing seems to be at once thoroughly agnostic and thoroughly erroneous. It implies that all knowledge of God is unreal, and all thoughts of Him meaningless. Were it true, there could be no rational and moral communion between God and man.

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## IV. THE AGNOSTICISM OF HAMILTON, MANSEL, AND SPENCER

Agnosticism has never been advocated with more sincerity, earnestness, and ability than the form of it with which I have now to deal. Yet it has been so often subjected to careful and competent criticism that it does not ~~seem~~ necessary to dwell on it otherwise than briefly.

I. Sir Wm. Hamilton's agnosticism rested on that of Kant, and was a quite natural sequel to it. He followed Kant in denying that God can be known while affirming that God ought to be believed in. He was not, however, a disciple of Kant. He adhered in the main to the teaching of Dr. Thomas Reid, although in various respects he dissented from it and attempted to improve it. The "Transcendental Idealism" of Kant, on the other hand, and the whole of German philosophy so far as it was the product or evolution of that "idealism," he rejected. The hypothesis of the entire subjectivity of the perceived world he regarded as a dogmatic absurdity inconsistent with all true criticism of the perceptive faculty. He attributed to the mind immediate intuitive power, and held that in perception there is direct apprehension of external phenomena, as there is of internal phenomena in introspective consciousness. His own doctrine he held to be not idealism but realism, not representationism but presentationism, and consequently inconsistent with all scepticism, whereas Kant's so-called "critical idealism" he deemed necessarily and essentially sceptical. Yet notwith-

standing that conscious antagonism to Kant, he was largely influenced by the great German thinker. He was the first Scottish professor to make any earnest study of Kant's writings, and naturally he could not fail to come under his spell both to his advantage and disadvantage. It was to his disadvantage so far as regards the subject under consideration.

He followed Kant in denying that God can be known by us, while at the same time he affirmed that we may and ought to believe in the Divine existence on the testimony of our moral nature and of Scripture. He allowed that although we do *not know what God is*, we can *know that He is*. He entirely denied, however, that we can know God, and even held that God is not, and cannot be, what we think Him to be. To that very dogmatic and seemingly altogether unprovable view he gave very strong expression. "To think," he says, "that God is, as we can think Him to be, is blasphemy. The last and highest consecration of all true religion must be an altar *Ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ*. To the unknown and unknowable God." Sir William was unfortunate in his reference to Scripture. *Ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ* means neither "*the unknown*" nor "*the unknowable God*" and still less "*the unknown and unknowable God*," but merely "*an unknown God*." The Athenians, like many other polytheists, thought some recognition and reverence due not only to known and native but also to unknown and foreign gods; and it was quite natural that they should often feel doubtful as to what god had favoured or afflicted them, and anxious lest some deity had been overlooked by them. One God, the

only God, can alone satisfy the human mind and heart, and although He transcends finite comprehension, St. Paul cannot have regarded Him as either unknown or unknowable, seeing that he readily undertook to declare to the Athenians who and what the true God really was. Obviously St. Paul did not consider it blasphemy to think God to be what he (St. Paul) thought Him to be; and as obviously there is nothing to justify the statement that "to think that God is, as we think Him to be, is blasphemy." We can and do think, although, of course, only in our imperfect human ways, that God is the self-existent and eternal cause of all finite, temporary, and dependent beings; that He is the ultimate and inexhaustible source of all power, life, law, and order in the universe; that He is infinite and eternal, omnipotent and omniscient, and wise, good, just, and holy far beyond our best conceptions. Where is the blasphemy in so thinking? Is it not, on the contrary, blasphemy to deny it either in thought or speech?

The affirmation that God is unknowable is rested by Hamilton on three principles—viz., 1°, All human knowledge is relative; 2°, All human thinking is conditioned; and 3°, The notions of the Infinite and the Absolute, as entertained by man, are "mere negations of thought." They are all very important principles in the Hamiltonian philosophy. Indeed they were regarded by Hamilton himself as its most important principles. All the arguments directed by him against the cognoscibility of God rest on them. They supply the ultimate major principle in each case. A thorough discussion of them would occupy

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much time, but I shall deal with them very briefly, and only in their bearing on the theological question in hand.

Hamilton agreed with Kant in denying that God can be known, yet it is only justice to him to say that his relation to Kant in the matter was not one of dependence. Kant's criticism of the theistic proofs rested on no philosophical theory or specific principles. It consisted of objections which had been often urged and as often shown to be paltry or irrelevant, whereas those of Hamilton had at least the merit of resting on definite and homogeneous "principles,"—the principles of a philosophy which he held to be not only distinct from, but antagonistic to, that of Kant.

Much of the argumentation on the strength of which he so confidently affirmed God to be unknowable rested on the first of his principles,—the principle that "all human knowledge is relative." From that he inferred that God, in whose existence he was a sincere believer, could not be known as what He is, an eternal and self-existent Being, the Absolute Being, or, in brief, "the Absolute." What, then, did he mean by "the relativity of cognition" or "the principle of relativity"? Unfortunately not one thing but three,—three significations, two of which are true but do not in the least degree imply that God is "unknowable," and the third of which, the only one from which the incognoscibility of God can be inferred, is false, and in no respect warrants men regarding God as "unknowable."

The first meaning given by Hamilton to the prin-



ciple of relativity was that nothing can be known entirely in and for itself, or out of relation to all else: nothing, that is to say, can be known as an utterly indeterminate and entirely isolated entity, without any relation to anything, and without either internal distinctions or external manifestations. That is not to be denied, and no sane person denies it. Nobody holds that God is known without reference to His works, His manifestations, His attributes, His relationships. The Absolute, as defined by Hamilton, that which exists in and by itself, aloof from and out of all relation, does not and cannot exist. It is a pure absurdity and not to be identified with God. A Being without attributes—with nothing distinctive of it—out of all relations—who neither causes, sustains, nor rules the universe—is an unintelligible and incredible being and no God. Not to know such a so-called God could be no privation at all. Relation is not to be identified, as it was by Sir W. Hamilton, with restriction. The absence of power to enter into relationship is real restriction. Just because the Absolute Being, the self-existent Being, God is the most related of all beings and the most closely connected with all contingent things.

The second of Hamilton's significations of the relativity of knowledge is that nothing can be known except in relation to a self and its powers of knowing; or, in his own words, "Knowledge is relative, 1°, Because existence is not cognisable, absolutely and in itself, but only in special modes; 2°, Because these modes can be known only if they stand in a certain relation to our faculties; and 3°, Because the

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modes, thus relative to our faculties, are presented to, and known by, the mind only under modifications, determined by these faculties themselves." Now that signification has in it what is additional to the content of the first but not what contradicts it, and it too is quite consistent with the cognoscibility of God, and the consequent reasonableness of belief in the Absolute intelligently apprehended. It is a signification so manifestly true that one is apt to call it a truism; but truism or not, it is a truth of value, and Hamilton did well to emphasise its worth. Nothing either absolute or relative—nothing from the infinitely great to the infinitesimally small—is knowable apart from a knowing mind. Knowing is a mind acting, an intelligence energising, in the form called knowing.

The third signification assigned by Hamilton to the proposition "all knowledge is relative" was "all knowledge is phenomenal." That meaning, however, is of a very different character from the first and second. All knowledge is relative does not imply that all knowledge is phenomenal. No number of repetitions that it does in either the first or second sense, or in any reasonable sense whatever, can be of any force or relevancy, but must be merely the reiterated assertion of a very obvious error which rests on a thoroughly false conception both of the nature of knowledge and of the nature of the Absolute. That all knowledge is relative in the sense that every being or thing is known only in determinate modes of existence and in relation to other beings or things is quite true, and no person can

reasonably suppose that God is otherwise known. That all knowledge is relative in the sense that every being or thing is known by us in relation to our faculties of knowing is also true, and what man in his senses would contest its application to our knowledge of God? That all knowledge is relative in the sense that all knowledge is confined to phenomena is false, and as false with reference to our knowledge of God as to our knowledge of other beings and things. The relativity of human thought, instead of disabling the mind from transcending mere phenomena, is the very condition or law of thought which enables and even compels intelligence to transcend mere phenomena. It prevents thought, indeed, from dispensing with phenomena—from ever eliminating from itself a phenomenal element,—but so far from confining or restricting it to phenomena, it makes such confinement or restriction impossible. Quality cannot be thought of apart from a subject. Quantity in space or time cannot be conceived without the implication of immensity and eternity. An event carries the mind to a cause; the derivative supposes the self-subsistent; the finite offered to perception introduces to an infinite supplied by thought, &c. Those correlatives are not mutually exclusive but mutually implicative. They are on a perfect equality of intellectual validity. Hence the relativity of human knowledge, instead of disabling the mind from transcending mere phenomena, enables, and even compels—nay, constantly compels—it to do so.

Sir Wm. Hamilton, however, had what he re-

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garded as a second fundamental principle which entitled him to affirm the incognoscibility of the Infinite and Absolute; and that principle he based on the alleged axiom that "to think is to condition,"—an axiom which he believed to be an insurmountable barrier to all possible knowledge of God as infinite or absolute, seeing that the infinite and absolute are forms of the unconditioned, and the unconditioned is necessarily unknowable. In his own vigorous language: "As the conditionally limited (which we may briefly call the conditioned) is the only possible object of knowledge and of positive thought, thought necessarily supposes conditions. To think is to condition, and conditional limitation is the fundamental law of the possibility of thought. For, as the greyhound cannot outstrip his shadow, nor (by a more appropriate simile) the eagle outsoar the atmosphere in which he floats, and by which alone he may be supported, so the mind cannot transcend the sphere of limitation, within and through which exclusively possibility of thought is realised."<sup>1</sup> The statement suggests some doubts which are not removed and some queries which have not been answered. Granting that the Infinite cannot be comprehended or imagined, may it not be apprehended? Ought not comprehension and apprehension to have been distinguished? It is only apprehensive knowledge that is generally claimed. Further, if the Unconditioned be, as Hamilton affirmed, *unknowable*, how did he know that it was a genus or generic notion with two

<sup>1</sup> *Discussions on Philosophy*, p. 14. The argument is often repeated, but is little varied in statement, and the proposition on which it wholly turns is never very precisely explained.

specific notions involved in it, viz., the Infinite and the Absolute? and especially how did he arrive at his species? We only form a notion of species by adding to the genus some differentia, some condition which distinguishes the species from other species. But it seems manifest that there is no place for that process in connection with the Unconditioned. A species of unconditioned determined or discriminated by a condition is a self-contradiction and absurdity. Again, was Hamilton justified in considering the Infinite and Absolute as distinct and mutually exclusive species of the Unconditioned,—the Infinite being *the unconditionally unlimited* and the Absolute *the unconditionally limited*? I think not. The unconditionally unlimited is no more than simply unlimited, and the unconditionally limited is the unconditionally conditioned or unlimitedly limited—*i.e.*, the expressly self-contradictory, the purely absurd. The Absolute and the Infinite are not to be represented as distinct and mutually exclusive; on the contrary, the Absolute is to be conceived of as infinite and the Infinite as absolute if either of them is to be regarded in a reasonable manner. They are inseparable, not exclusive.

Hamilton's dictum "To think is to condition" has, like his proposition "All knowledge is relative," at least three meanings, and they may not be all alike true. It seems to me that they are not all true, and that only the meanings which are not true are inconsistent with the cognoscibility of the unconditioned. The most common signification of the term "condition" is that which precedes and renders possible

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something else. In that sense one object is conditioned by another when it is dependent upon it and conditions another when it is a ground of that other object's existence. If "to condition" be thus understood, "to think is to condition" must mean that whatever is thought of is conceived of as dependent, as derivative. But is there any warrant for such a view? I am not aware of any. Has any proof of it been attempted? None. It takes for granted that God being not a dependent being cannot be known; but not a particle of evidence is adduced that only a dependent being can be known.

"To condition" may, however, also mean "to limit," and that second signification Hamilton often expressly assigned to it. But to say that thought is confined to the limited is not only again plainly to beg the conclusion which the so-called axiom "to think is to condition" is professedly employed to establish, but is itself an assertion manifestly and greatly in need of proof. It needs it just as much as the proposition that God is unknowable, and, in reality, is just that conclusion in disguise and put forward as a premise.

I refuse, then, *in toto*, to grant that "to think is to condition" in either of the senses already indicated. But the phrase may have a third sense. "To condition" may mean "to conceive of as having attributes,"—as not wholly indefinite and indeterminate, as a subject of predication. And in that sense it is perfectly true; but then in that sense one must be dim-eyed indeed not to see that it affords no support whatever to the opinion that God cannot be known.



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Hamilton had what he regarded as another—a third principle—entitling him to deny the cognoscibility of the Absolute and the Infinite. The notion of either he affirmed to be “a mere negation of thought.” He could not deny that we have the words “infinite” and “absolute,” nor that, like all other words, they imply *notions* of some kind. Hence he had to explain those words and notions in some way in accordance with his hypothesis. It may suffice for our purpose to show merely how he deals with one of them, “the infinite.” God, he holds, cannot be known as infinite. Knowledge is only of the finite. The finite is knowable, the infinite unknowable.

Such an affirmation, however, is far from obviously in accordance with his principle of the relativity of knowledge. From that principle the far more natural inference would seem to be that we must know both the finite and the infinite. The finite and the infinite are correlatives. But correlatives imply each other—are known in and through each other in the same act of thought. To deny knowledge of either appears to involve denial of knowledge of the other, one being no more knowable in and by itself than the other. Yet Hamilton confines knowledge to the sphere of the finite, and excludes it from the sphere of the infinite. Why? Because he supposed the idea of the infinite to be merely negative, and that of the finite to be positive. But there is really no other ground for that supposition than that the term finite is positive and the term infinite is negative. A most superficial reason! A negative term does not neces-

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sarily convey a merely negative notion. A term which does convey a merely negative notion is one which has no meaning at all. The idea which corresponds to the term infinite is not a negation, but a very different thing indeed, the negation of negation, the negation of limitation. God is infinite means that He has *unlimited* perfections. The Infinite is reality in entirety of perfection, or reality *minus* defect and limitation of any kind. The finite is reality *plus* defects and limits.

To warrant our either denying the infinite or assuming that it cannot be known, we ought to make sure that there is nothing for us to know except the finite or limited; that is to say, we ought to prove the finite to be the absolute,—to be all that is and yet finite. But to know or believe in *the absolutely finite* would be far more difficult than to know or believe in *the absolutely infinite*. It would be utterly impossible. The absolutely finite is a self-contradiction. The limited implies always a limiting. It cannot be limited by itself; does not suffice of itself; supposes somewhat beyond itself. The absolutely finite must be limited either by nothing or something. If by nothing it must be really infinite. If by something it must be not an absolute but a relative finite. There can be no absolute finite. If the finite is to be intelligible, and thought rational, the infinite must be. Whether we consider the world, or space, or time, or being, it is impossible for us to escape the supplementary and correlative idea of infinity. The finite apart from the infinite is the more mysterious of the two.

In a word, the finite and the infinite being cor-relatives, being known in and through each other, necessarily in the same act of thought, the knowledge of the one is as necessary as the knowledge of the other, and knowledge of neither can be denied without knowledge of the other being involved. To affirm that the finite is comprehensible in and by itself alone, is as unwarranted an assertion as to affirm that the infinite is so. The infinite could never come into apprehension apart from all thought of the finite, but the finite apart from all apprehension of the infinite is also incognisable. As Martineau has said: "There can be no objection to call the one 'positive' and the other 'negative,' provided it be understood that *each* is so with regard to the other, and that the relation is convertible: the finite, for instance, being the negative of the infinite, not less than the infinite of the finite." (Essays, p. 327.) Knowledge of the one, however, cannot be taken, and knowledge of the other left, as knowledge of each depends upon knowledge of the other.

Hamilton distinctly denied that we can know God as either infinite or absolute, yet He maintained that we ought nevertheless to believe in God. What, then, did he mean by knowledge of and belief in God? How did he distinguish between knowledge and belief? Strangely enough, he bestowed little care on that part of his theory. The following is almost the only explicit passage regarding it to be found in his writings: "We *know* what rests upon reason; we *believe* what rests upon authority. But reason itself must rest at last upon authority; for the original data

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of reason do not rest upon reason, but are necessarily accepted by reason on the authority of what is beyond itself. These data are, therefore, in rigid propriety, Beliefs or Trusts. Thus it is that, in the last resort, we must, per force, philosophically admit that belief is the primary condition of reason, and not reason the ultimate ground of belief."

It would be difficult, I think, to fall into more oversights or errors in so short a space. "*We know*," says Hamilton, "what rests upon reason." Yes, and whatever we know we cannot but believe. "We believe what rests upon authority." Wise men do so only when they know the authority to be true and good. "But reason itself must at last rest upon authority." Certainly not; the reverse is the truth,—authority should rest at last on reason: reason alone can decide what is rightful authority and what is not. "The original data of reason do not rest upon reason, but are necessarily accepted by reason on the authority of what is beyond itself." No assertion could be more inaccurate. The original data of reason are the primary perceptions of reason, necessarily accepted by reason on no authority but its own,—on no other ground than clear and immediate self-evidence. "These data are, in rigid propriety, Beliefs or Trusts." But, with quite as much propriety, they may be called, and indeed are called by Hamilton himself, Cognitions and Judgments. They are beliefs and trusts only because primarily cognitions and judgments. Thus Hamilton's concluding statement, that, "in the last resort, we must, per force, philosophically admit that belief is the

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primary condition of reason, and not reason the ultimate ground of belief," must be regarded as erroneous.

God as infinite he maintained to be wholly incognisable. Were that so, belief in God would be a mere superstition. The idea of God as an Infinite Person he argued to be self-contradictory, on the ground that infinity and personality excluded each other. Were that the case, the idea of God ought to be rejected. If God is, the true idea of God cannot be self-contradictory. All thought which is self-contradictory must be untruthful. God can only be truly thought of as Absolute Reason, the perfect realisation and satisfaction of reason; certainly not when thought of as self-contradiction. "*Credo quia absurdum*" can be the only appropriate motto of a philosophy which holds that we may believe in a God the very idea of whom we can perceive to be self-contradictory.

On what ground, then, it may well be asked, did Hamilton rest faith in God? It was on a very strange one,—on "a mental impotency" to which he gave expression in what he called "the law of the conditioned." That law he regarded as the ultimate ground beyond reason on which faith in God rests.

Its nature is clearly described in the two following extracts. "The Conditioned is that which is alone conceivable or cogitable; the Unconditioned that which is inconceivable or incogitable. The conditioned or the thinkable lies between two extremes or poles; and each of these extremes or poles is unconditioned, each of them inconceivable, each of

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them exclusive or contradictory of the other. Of these two repugnant opposites, the one is that of Unconditional or Absolute Limitation; the other that of Unconditioned or Infinite Illimitation; or, more simply, the Absolute and the Infinite; the term *absolute* expressing that which is finished or complete, the term *infinite* that which cannot be terminated or concluded.”<sup>1</sup>

“*The conditioned is the mean between two extremes—two inconditionates exclusive of each other, neither of which can be conceived as possible, but of which, on the principle of contradiction and excluded middle, one must be admitted as necessary.* We are thus warned from recognising the domain of our knowledge as necessarily coextensive with the horizon of our faith. And by a *wonderful revelation* we are thus, in the very consciousness of our inability to conceive aught above the relative and the finite, *inspired with a belief in the existence of something unconditioned beyond the sphere of all comprehensible reality.*”<sup>2</sup> There we have what is central and most distinctive in Hamilton’s doctrine as to our necessary ignorance of God yet our necessary belief in Him. It rests on a most extraordinary conception of the so-called law of the conditioned and a strange want of perception that either the asserted incognoscibility or the asserted contradiction of the extremes must be abandoned.

The so-called “law” affirms that all true thought—all true knowledge—lies between two extremes

<sup>1</sup> *Metaphysics*, ii. 372, 373, but read also from 368 to 375.

<sup>2</sup> *Discussions*, p. 15, but see also pp. 12–29.



which are directly contradictory, and, at the same time, utterly unthinkable and unknowable. But manifestly such an assertion, instead of being the enunciation of a true law of thought, is a self-contradiction. If the two extremes are both utterly unknown and unthinkable how can they be either known or thought to be contradictory? We cannot know to be contradictory things of which we can have no knowledge. Hamilton affirms as a fundamental law of thought that two absolutely unknown notions or things are known to be contradictory and exclusive of each other. But the affirmation is an absurdity, seeing that before we are entitled to pronounce two things, two terms, to be contradictory, we must know something, and something definite, about both,—must have apprehended them, composed them, and passed a judgment regarding them, founded on our knowledge of them. If we know nothing of two things we cannot distinguish them, and if we cannot distinguish them we cannot reasonably affirm that they are contradictory and exclusive of each other. They may just as well be inseparable, complementary, or even identical. Hamilton thought he showed the two extremes to be contradictory. But how? By means of the definitions which he gave them. Just so. But how could he define things which he did not know? Is it not an elementary principle of logic that definition requires knowledge?

There is another reason for rejecting Sir Wm. Hamilton's so-called "law," at least in the form which he gave to it. The "principle of excluded middle" does not admit of what the conditioned is

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said to be,—does not admit of a mean between two contradictories. It excludes precisely what Hamilton affirmed. The notion of mentioning “the law of excluded Middle” and “two contradictories with a mean between them” as both true, and in the same sentence, was far from a happy idea. If the two contradictory extremes are equally unthinkable, yet include a thinkable mean, why insist upon the acceptance of either extreme? The necessity of accepting one of the contradictories is wholly based upon the impossibility of a mean. On the other hand, if a mean between two contradictions be, as it undoubtedly is, unthinkable and incredible, what becomes of Hamilton’s “conditioned”? It vanishes. It passes into the limbo of absurdities.<sup>1</sup>

II. Dean Mansel built on the foundations laid by Sir Wm. Hamilton. Although he rejected some of the views of the latter, as, for example, his theory of causation, he adopted with great zeal and thorough conviction his philosophy as a whole, and in his *Bampton Lectures*, preached at Oxford in 1858, he undertook to apply the principles of that philosophy—the philosophy of the conditioned—to determine the limits of religious thought, and did so with an ability which secured for his work great celebrity. His undoubted purpose was to serve the cause of “natural and revealed religion”; and it seemed to him that the most effective method of overcoming

<sup>1</sup> For the views of Sir W. Hamilton which have been referred to see his *Logic*, ii. 61–73; *Metaphysics*, ii. 137–149; and *Discussions*, 1–38, and 602–649. His chief critics are mentioned in a subsequent note. For a favourable view of his doctrines see Veitch’s *Hamilton* in “Blackwood’s Philosophical Classics.” See also the article *Hamilton* by Miss Hamilton in *Encyc. Brit.*, 1880.

the objections urged against both was to determine as accurately as possible the limits of religious thought. That he undertook to do, and accordingly what he aimed at in his lectures was to supply a conclusive answer to the following question,—“Whether the human mind be capable of acquiring such a knowledge as can warrant it to decide either *for or against* the claims of any professed Revelation, as containing a true or a false representation of the Divine Nature and Attributes?” That question he answered in the negative, and thereby committed himself, at the very outset of what should have been an impartial investigation, to advocate the cause of a religious agnosticism. He took up a sceptical attitude towards the problem, or problems, with which he had to deal, and he did so with a dogmatic aim, that of keeping human criticism out of the sphere of religion and of a professed revelation, and largely under the influence of a most unfortunate motive,—the fear of German criticism of revelation. Substantially his *Bampton Lecture* was an exposition and advocacy of the same sort of theological scepticism which had been prevalent in the seventeenth century.

I shall treat of the teaching of Mansel even more briefly than I have done with what corresponds to it in the teaching of Hamilton. Indeed, I shall do little more than indicate the chief respects in which I differ from the doctrine in his first three lectures,—those which present us with what is most distinctive and comprehensive in his argumentation against the knowability of God. To attempt a refutation of all the theological agnosticism which he has taught with

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a view to defend special revelation and the cause of God would require a book larger than his own, and would necessarily be a very scholastic and most tiresome affair. It is necessary, however, to state what one thinks to be the fundamental errors into which he fell, and why one thinks so.

1°. *The corner-stone of the doctrinal structure raised by Mansel is the proposition that a knowledge of God sufficient to justify our criticising the representations of the Divine Nature and Attributes set forth in any professed revelation can only be attained by the construction of a Philosophy of the Infinite and Absolute.* Mansel, however, although he started with that proposition, and assumed the truth of it throughout his whole course of lectures, made no serious attempt to prove it. He started from it as if it were an axiom. Yet it is so far from axiomatic that this counter-proposition may be safely opposed to it: Only the most reckless speculative thinkers will venture to undertake the construction of a Philosophy of the Infinite and Absolute, and God has so manifested Himself in nature, mind, and history, in the "Bibles" of the nations and in the spiritual experiences of individuals, that men may quite reasonably judge of the claims of any professedly special revelation set before them for acceptance. God does not ask from rational beings a blind assent to whatever professes to be a special revelation.

2°. *According to Mansel, there are only two conceivable methods of arriving at a philosophical knowledge of God—a subjective or psychological and an objective or metaphysical,—one based on a knowledge*

*of the mental faculties of men and the other on a supposed knowledge of the nature of God,—and by neither of those methods can such a knowledge be attained.* His so-called subjective and objective methods, however, are not two distinct and contrasted methods, but simply inquiries into different yet correlative parts of a common theme; and Mansel himself, although he maintained that they do not lead us to a knowledge of the Infinite and the Absolute, could not deny that they lead to a real knowledge of religion. A philosophy of the absolute and infinite is no more the presupposition of one kind of knowledge than of another,—of a science of religion than of a science of quantitative relations, or of physical forces, or of organic forms, or of mental states. If the presupposition of anything, it must be the presupposition of everything. The want of it can lead to the conclusion that the criticism of religion is essentially illegitimate no more reasonably than it can lead to the conclusion that the criticism of all other things is also illegitimate.

3°. *Mansel employed the terms “infinite” and “absolute” in a sense in which he did not believe them to be true, and held them to be true in a sense which was incomprehensible to him.* That he did so may be fairly inferred from the character of his argumentation in various places. The most explicit proof-passage is the note to page 36 of preface to the fourth edition of his *Bampton Lectures*. The counter-proposition is that he did not show that the terms “infinite” and “absolute” can only denote absurd and self-contradictory notions or realities of which

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we can have no knowledge; did not show them to be destitute of meanings both intelligible and self-consistent. They have such meanings, and Mansel had no right to assume that they should be used either in an absurd sense or with no sense, and for no better reason apparently than that he thought some German metaphysician had so employed them.

4°. *According to Mansel, God can only be known as First Cause, the Absolute and the Infinite,—conceptions which are not reconcilable with one another, and inevitably give rise to inextricable dilemmas.* In order, however, to give plausibility to that view, he had to start with arbitrarily defined abstractions of his own creation, and to reason from them in a very questionable way. The part of his work to which I refer (pp. 27-44), is, indeed, very ingenious, but the insight displayed in it is small in comparison with the ingenuity,—and hence even the ingenuity is of a kind which one cannot altogether admire—the scholastic ingenuity which makes words seem to do duty for thoughts. It is especially in reading the second lecture that one can most easily understand why it so deeply grieved and offended Mr. Maurice. To a man so intensely realistic, and so intensely anxious to look at actual facts in their true relations, as Maurice was, such a logical evolution of abstract notions and verbal definitions as that of Mansel—one which throughout reminds us both of the doctrine and method of the arid scholasticism represented by the *Doctor subtilis*, Duns Scotus—naturally seemed not merely an involuntary self-deception, but a heartless and almost impious procedure.



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5°. *Mansel maintains that the Absolute cannot be conceived of as either conscious or unconscious, simple or complex, one or many, free or necessitated, inasmuch as the Absolute is exclusive of all distinctions and determinations.* But what he really proves is merely that his own ill-defined and so-called Absolute is a congeries of contradictions. The true Absolute,—God,—can only be self-consistently thought of as conscious, simple, one, and free, in the appropriate sense of those terms. It is not otherwise as regards the Infinite.

6°. *The reasoning of Mansel in his third lecture is to the effect that the universal conditions of human consciousness,—viz., 1. Distinction between one object and another, 2. Relation between subject and object, 3. Succession and duration in time, and 4. Personality,—render it impossible that the Absolute and Infinite should be objects of consciousness.* Were it conclusive, however, it would be fatal to Mansel's own doctrine, inasmuch as it would prove the Absolute and Infinite to be no more objects of belief than of knowledge. Belief is not less a state of consciousness than knowledge is, and must as such be impossible when the other is so. *Yet Mansel himself professed to believe in an Infinite and Absolute, although he also professed not to know them.* Hence his reasoning, if valid at all, manifestly destroyed the foundation of his own faith. Further, it can be quite conclusively shown that he either incorrectly stated or seriously misapplied all the four universal conditions ascribed by him to consciousness.

The fourth lecture gives a very defective account

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of Schleiermacher's theory of the nature of religion, inasmuch as it not only leaves its merits unindicated, but quite erroneously represents it as contemplating God chiefly as "an object of infinite magnitude." It also characterises what Schleiermacher calls "the feeling of absolute dependence" as "a contradiction in terms," inasmuch as consciousness is itself an activity, and as "inconsistent with the duty of prayer," since prayer is essentially a state in which man is in active relation towards God. Therein, however, it ignores a very important truth in the theory, namely, that the religious activity implied both in prayer and practice is very largely that of self-renunciation.

In the two following lectures great stress is laid on the distinction between speculative and regulative truth and on the respective provinces of reason and faith. But that portion of his teaching was, it seems to me, as justly as it was strongly condemned both by Maurice and J. S. Mill. The assertion that "in religion, in morals, in our daily business, in the care of our lives, in the exercise of our senses, the rules which guide our practice cannot be reduced to principles which satisfy our reason," requires to be corrected and supplemented by the further statement that in all these departments no rules not derived from the real nature of things and founded on truth satisfactory to reason and conscience can fail to mislead and corrupt practice. "Truth" is affirmed to be "nothing more than a relation," although there can be no relations without realities; and "truth and falsehood" are described as "properties of concep-

tions and not of things, but relations of intelligences and their conceptions to the natures of things."

The seventh lecture is pervaded by moral scepticism. It is the lecture in which Mansel represents the notion of an absolute morality—*i.e.*, of a moral law binding on all intelligences—as a mere fiction; charges Kant and those who believe in such a morality with making their own morality the measure of absolute morality, although their aim was just the reverse—namely, to find a morality higher, truer, and more stable and permanent than their own; and represents human and divine morality as so entirely different as to involve a denial of likeness between God and man, render moral communion between them impossible, and deprive of all meaning or value any ascriptions of righteousness, sanctity, love, and mercy to the Almighty. It was with such views that he fancied the difficulties attached to such doctrines as the Atonement, Predestination, Original Sin, Eternal Punishment, &c., could be removed. The text of the lecture was a strangely inappropriate one, —Ezekiel xviii. 25: "Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? Are not your ways unequal?" Were the teaching given in the lecture true, what could the questions in the text mean? or, how could there be any reasoning between the Lord and Israel?

The last of Mansel's lectures drew attention to itself chiefly by the strange doctrine that the Almighty might suspend not only physical but ethical laws, and that such suspensions might reasonably be regarded as *moral miracles*. No portion of his teach-

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ing, perhaps, gave so much offence. The chief thesis, however, maintained in the lecture was that Christianity as a revelation must be accepted chiefly on the ground of *external evidence*, and *wholly or not at all*, or, in other words, in such a way as will get rid in a large measure of the criticism of human reason. To get that thesis accepted was the chief aim of his Bampton Lectures, and their chief defect. Happily for the cause of Christian truth and of spiritual progress it is a thesis which the human mind, fortunately for itself, never will establish or accept. It would be death to itself and death to religion if it did. Any so-called revelation or religion which must be accepted without criticism is one which cannot supply the wants of the human spirit.<sup>1</sup>

III. Mr. Herbert Spencer, whose agnosticism has already been referred to (see pp. 55-59), has attained a unique position in England as a philosopher, and a well-deserved world-wide reputation. No one, perhaps, has done more not merely to popularise the development theory but to advance and extend it in all directions both by his own exertions and by his influence on others. Hence his services have been of inestimable value alike to philosophy and theol-

<sup>1</sup> Mansel's agnosticism is expounded in his *Bampton Lectures*, 4th ed., 1859, his *Metaphysics* (*Encyc. Brit.*, 8th ed.), and *Philosophy of the Conditioned*, 1866. Among his critics have been J. S. Mill in *Examination of Sir W. Hamilton's Philosophy*, ch. vii.; Maurice, *What is Revelation?* Martineau's *Essays Philosophical and Theological*, 1885; Professor Davidson, *Theism and Human Nature*, 140-159; Pfeiderer, *Development of Theology*, 327-329; Caldecott, *Philosophy of Religion*, 405-410. There is an admirable refutation of Mansel's arguments for "the doctrine that all our attempts to form to ourselves the idea of God involve us in contradiction" in the *Natural Theology* of Father Bødder, S.J., pp. 214-232.

ogy. Forty years ago the fear that philosophy, and especially theology, would be ruined by the doctrine of evolution was widely prevalent. All fear of the kind has now almost vanished, and there are few educated and intelligent persons who do not recognise that what was then regarded as a terrible danger to religion and theology is, and must be, of incalculable value to both. It has come to be clearly seen by the vast majority of thoughtful men that the evolution of the universe through countless ages, in accordance with regular and beneficial laws, is necessarily a far richer and more instructive self-manifestation of the Divine than any mere act of instantaneous creation could be, and that material and mental nature alike must at any given moment or stage have immensely less of either physical or spiritual, natural or supernatural, truth in them to reveal than there is in their development and history.

Mr. Spencer inevitably promoted the cause of agnosticism in Britain owing to his being its most illustrious adherent. He could not fail to reflect some of the light and lustre of his own genius on the doctrine he taught. To agree with Mr. Spencer on such abstruse themes as the absolute, the infinite, and the unknowable may well have seemed to many persons evidence of their own intellectual superiority to ordinary mankind. Otherwise, however, than in such a general way he does not seem to have done much for agnosticism. His agnosticism, as he has always candidly stated, was almost entirely derived from the teaching of Hamilton and Mansel. It is not at all in the elaboration and exposition of it—not in “Part

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I. The Unknowable," of his *First Principles*—that one can see his real merits and unquestionable mental power. There he is only to be seen uncritically accepting the errors taught by Hamilton and Mansel, and employing the same metaphysical abstractions and equivocal terms and formulæ in the same worse than unprofitable way. The arguments of Mansel in his *Bampton Lectures* (II. and III.), so obviously depended on such erroneous definitions and abstractions as *The Infinite*, *The Absolute*, and *The Unconditioned*—mere absurdities unthinkable by any human intellect if dissociated from Space, Time, and Deity, and pretended to be in themselves entities—and on ratiocination of the worst scholastic kind, that one cannot fail to wonder how Mr. Spencer should have been deluded by such medieval jugglery. He was almost the only, if not the only, British or American philosopher of repute who was deceived by it. Nor was it much if any otherwise as regards European philosophical opinion anywhere. Even the French, German, and Italian philosophers who were most appreciative of Mr. Spencer's treatment of the knowable had little good to say of his views on the unknowable. M. Renouvier, perhaps the most eminent living philosophical criticist in Europe, was among the first and most destructive assailants of the agnostic section of Mr. Spencer's philosophy.<sup>1</sup> So far as regards what is taught in that section it seems to have been quite conclusively shown that it is erroneous.

<sup>1</sup> My reference is to the articles headed "Examen des *Premiers principes* de Herbert Spencer," and published in the *Critique Philosophique* during the years 1885 and 1886.



It does not follow, however, that Mr. Spencer's positive or synthetic philosophy has been thereby destroyed or fatally injured. Even in it, of course, many defects have been found, and more may still be found, but all that can be said to have been evidently and irretrievably confuted is what can be no great loss. The unknowable must be wholly unknown, and cannot affect us in the least either for good or evil. The mysterious will always remain with us to stimulate us to seek knowledge and to cultivate reverence.

Mr. Spencer identifies God with the Absolute, and on that ground pronounces God to be unknowable. His reason for doing so is the relativity of knowledge. But the relativity of knowledge rationally understood, we have already seen, is no reason whatever for regarding either God, the World, or Self as unknowable. Were there any truth in the assumption that the relativity of knowledge excludes us from knowledge of any of the ultimates of knowledge, it would in self-consistency exclude us from knowledge of them all; that is to say, it would involve us in universal scepticism,—in ignorance of God indeed but also of self and the universe.

Mr. Spencer divides and distributes all reality into the knowable and unknowable. The knowable is affirmed to contain all that is phenomenal, and the unknowable all that is noumenal. The phenomenal and noumenal, the relative and absolute, the conditioned and unconditioned, are thus severed from each other and contrasted by him in the sharpest way. That is, however, necessarily an arbitrary and dog-

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matic way, and one for which Mr. Spencer has adduced neither epistemological nor psychological reasons. His decision is merely a *sic volo, sic jubeo*; and that is obviously not enough. No proof is given that there is any sharp distinction, or indeed any distinction of an objective kind, between science and nescience, so-called phenomena and noumena, &c. Nor is it in the least likely that there is any such hard-and-fast distinction.

The true Absolute is not exclusive but comprehensive of all real and self-consistent relationships. To an infinite intellect there can be no nescience. There may be innumerable intelligences, the limits of whose knowledge as far transcend those of man as the limits of human intelligence transcend those of a mollusc or an insect. Science is not a self-contained whole on all sides closely shut in by what man is pleased to call the Absolute or Unconditioned, under the illusion that what he does not know cannot be known. Practically, so far as man is concerned, science has no limits except self-consistency of thought and the measure of intellect allotted to him. We can distinguish vague from exact knowledge, but we cannot reasonably say thus far all is science or knowable but beyond all is nescience or unknowable.

Mr. Spencer has, of course, refrained from expressly declaring "The Unknowable" to be *known* to himself or others, but he comes very near indeed to doing so when he assures us that man has a *consciousness of the unknowable*, and that all that is knowable *depends on and is the manifestation of the unknowable*. In like manner, he declares "The Ab-

solute " to be *not only unknown but also unknowable*, yet expressly and confidently affirms it to be " the fundamental reality which underlies all that appears," and " the omnipresent Causal Energy or Power of which all phenomena, physical and mental, are the manifestations." He even expressly informs us—and we are, of course, glad to receive the information—that this " Power must be conceived as certainly not lower than personal"; that " though the Absolute cannot in any manner or degree be known, in the strict sense of knowing, yet we find that its positive existence is a necessary datum of consciousness; that so long as consciousness continues, we cannot for an instant rid it of this datum; and that thus the belief which this datum constitutes, has a higher warrant than any other whatever." Such statements, and those akin to them, must prevent all honest critics of Mr. Herbert's doctrine of the unknowable not only from classing him, as some persons have done, among atheists, but from failing to recognise in him a natural piety, a religious reverence, which is quite conspicuous in his work.

The self-contradictoriness of his views of the Absolute, however, is of a kind too obvious to have escaped general observation. To assure us that it " manifests itself," " certainly exists," " cannot fail to be believed," " is consciously felt as existent in all orders of phenomena, in space and time, in subject and object, in spirit and matter," and " in recognition of which alone can religion and science be reconciled," and yet that it is not only entirely unknown but wholly unknowable to himself and all mankind,

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is surely as strange a paradox as has ever appeared in the history of philosophy. Yet that is just what Mr. Spencer has done. In one breath he assures us that the Power which the universe manifests to us is utterly inscrutable, and in the next that the inevitably felt existence of that unknowable Power is the one ineradicable and absolute certitude common to faith and reason, religion and science. The two assertions, however, are not shown to be reconcilable, although Mr. Spencer was obviously bound to do so before combining them in a doctrine which was to be the corner-stone of a vast philosophical structure. That he has not done; nor, I believe, can it be done. No power that "manifests itself" can be properly said to be "entirely inscrutable" or "entirely unknowable." All felt consciousness of certainty presupposes some apprehension of reality. Consciousness without some measure of cognition is no more conceivable than consciousness without feeling or volition. To warrant any one to assert, as Mr. Spencer does, that there is an absolute and unconditional, an eternal and omnipresent Power or Force, which is self-manifested to us although it is utterly inscrutable, he ought himself, in self-consistency, to *know* that Power or Force, and know it to be all that he affirms it to be, inscrutability included. But what a complication of contradictions and self-contradictions there is in such a conception,—self-evidently and unquestionably in it,—yet which Mr. Spencer has never even attempted to disentangle and harmonise!

He arbitrarily ascribes certain attributes to the

Absolute and as arbitrarily denies to it others. There is no more apparent reason for assigning to it metaphysical and dynamical attributes than intellectual and ethical attributes. The latter are of a higher character than the former. Mere force,—force apart from thought, righteousness, and love—apart from law, order, and purpose,—can only be a worthless, wasteful, dangerous thing, and certainly not a basis for the reconciliation of science and religion. If it be a Power, why should it not be an Intelligence and a Moral Personality? If it underlies and is implied in the very possibility of both science and religion, and of their possible reconciliation in the philosophy either of Mr. Spencer or of any other man of genius, why should he not ascribe to it omniscience and wisdom, righteousness and love, on the ground of the evidences of those attributes in nature, mind, history, and especially religious history, instead of merely eternity, omnipresence, inscrutability, and indefinite energy?

The attributes which he actually ascribes to the Absolute are just those with which the greatest difficulties are connected. Infinity and eternity are overwhelming thoughts. Positive evidence regarding them is not to be had. Strain our minds as we may in efforts to comprehend them, we can only attain very dim and limited apprehensions of them. A rising and vigorous school of theologians and philosophers,—the criticist school,—recommend us to cease affirmation of them and confine ourselves to think of Deity from an exclusively anthropological standpoint. All the knowledge of the transcendental

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attributes which we can reasonably claim to have depends merely on the self-consistency of thought; but human thought, especially in the regions of metaphysics and metempirics, is exceedingly apt to be very inconsistent. The evidences for assigning *mind* to the Absolute are quite as valid as those for assigning to it *power*. Mr. Spencer has, I think, gone so far that he ought to go much farther.

His view of the Absolute as *power* or *force* seems to me, as it has seemed to many others, quite as mysterious as any theological dogma. It appears irreconcilable with his positivist theory of knowledge or science. That seems directly to exclude, if accepted, all transcendence of the phenomena either of matter or mind. Yet Mr. Spencer expressly assumes and postulates that the Absolute as force does transcend them. It is not the force of either matter or spirit. Mr. Spencer disclaims being either a materialist or spiritualist. The "force" which seems to be the most distinctive idea in his doctrine is represented as belonging to neither matter nor mind, but as underlying both and independent of both,—a force which, if it act at all, acts *a tergo*, and of itself, from beyond all that the human mind can know or even in any way conceive. Physicists have complained that Mr. Spencer has often made use of the term "force" in a variety of senses without indicating the special sense in which it was or should be employed—*e.g.*, whether as denoting kinetic energy, or potential energy, or as cause of change of motion, or as a biological process, or as a general term for sense impressions.<sup>1</sup> Whether that be so or not, how-

<sup>1</sup> Karl Pearson, *Grammar of Science*, p. 389.



ever, is mainly a question for physicists. But far the most famous sense in which he employs it is none of those, but that in which he identifies "force" with the entirety of noumenal being, or with the Absolute, severing it thoroughly from and contrasting it with the phenomenal, and relegating it to an unknown and unknowable sphere beyond both matter and spirit—to what one may call "the back of beyond." Force in that sense is assuredly not knowable or even, properly speaking, conceivable. It is a mere idol of the brain,—one, however, which is not likely to be widely worshipped. A more wretched substitute for Deity there could not be. It is force which may be *said to do everything*, but which cannot *even be thought of as doing anything*. The late Professor Tait enjoyed saying that the only recorded instance of its action was the famous Baron Munchausen's journey to the moon. On that occasion the adventurous gentleman is reported to have pulled himself up by his boots. In no respect can an absolutely unknowable force be identified with or likened to known forces or specific energies.

According to Mr. Spencer religion has always had for its object the Unknowable and science the Knowable. Hence he represents the former as having always been throwing off imaginary knowledge until there is no knowledge to get rid of, whereas the latter has always been freeing itself from the imaginary and conjectural, and extending its acquaintance with the phenomenal and empirical. The facts, however, if adequately and impartially studied, contradict instead of supporting the generalisation.

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What history really and amply shows is that both science and religion have advanced in the same way. Both have, slowly perhaps, but on the whole surely, learned to correct their errors and grown richer in the knowledge appropriate to them. Neither the one nor the other has either begun or ended with the assumption that the Power or Force which the universe manifests is utterly unknowable. Knowledge and faith, religion and science, are not hostile but closely akin to each other, coming as they do from the same divine source, being fed with the divine sustenance, and tending to the same divine ends. Mr. Spencer's "Unknowable" is a poor substitute for the true Absolute. Hildebert, a pious and gifted archbishop of Tours in the eleventh century, gave a far more credible and worthy expression to the conception when he spake of God thus:—

“ Above all things, below all things ;  
Around all things, within all things ;  
Within all, but not shut in ;  
Around all, but not shut out ;  
Above all, as the Ruler ;  
Below all, as the Sustainer ;  
Around all, as all-embracing Protection ;  
Within all, as the Fulness of Life.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The literature relating to Spencer's primary philosophy is amply given in Ueberweg's *Grundriss*, Dr. Theil, 406, 407. Therefore I shall only mention Grosse's *Herbert Spencer's Lehre v. dem Unerkennbaren*, 1890, Gaup's *Erkenntnislehre Herbert Spencer*, 1890, Orr's *Christian View of God and the World*, pp. 97-112, Up-ton's *Hibbert Lectures*, pp. 97-124, and Dr. Ward's *Naturalism and Agnosticism*,—the heaviest assault which has yet been made on the foundations of Mr. Spencer's philosophy. See also *Theism*, pp. 288-301.

# AGNOSTICISM AS TO KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

## V. PRESENT WORK PART OF A SYSTEM OF NATURAL THEOLOGY

The present volume is part of what was many years ago announced as meant to form when completed a System of Natural Theology which would deal with four great problems:—

- 1°. To exhibit what evidence there is for belief in the existence of God;
- 2°. To refute anti-theistic theories,—atheism, materialism, positivism, secularism, pessimism, pantheism, and agnosticism;
- 3°. To delineate the character of God as disclosed by nature, mind, and history, and to show what light the truth thus ascertained casts upon man's duty and destiny; and,
- 4°. To trace the rise and development of the idea of God and the history of theistic speculation.

The first theme was dealt with in *Theism*; and the second in *Anti-Theistic Theories*,—agnosticism excepted, which is the subject of the present volume. The other two tasks indicated have not been treated of except at certain points where doing so could not well be avoided. In my article on *Theism*, however, in the ninth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* I have so far referred to what remains to be done, and the following extract from that article, *mutatis mutandis*, may, I hope, prove useful to readers of any of the three volumes,—*Theism*, *Anti-Theistic*

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*Theories*, and *Agnosticism*,—as well as suggest to reviewers that criticisms based merely on omissions must necessarily be premature.

The agnosticism originated by Kant has been one of the distinctive and prominent phenomena in the history of religion and theism during the nineteenth century. It sprang out of an earlier agnosticism. Hume and his predecessors admitted that the conditions of thought—otherwise, the categories of experience or ideas of reason—were in appearance necessary and objectively valid, but in reality only arbitrary and subjective, their seeming necessity and objectivity being illusory, and consequent on mere repetitions and accidental associations of sensations and feelings. Kant showed that they were not only seemingly but really necessary to thought, and irresolvable into the particular in experience. He denied, however, that we are entitled to consider them as of more than subjective applicability,—that what we necessarily think must necessarily be, or be as we think it. He affirmed all knowledge to be confined to experience, the phenomenal, the conditioned. It was quite in accordance with this view of the limits of knowledge that he should have denied that we can know God, even while he affirmed that we cannot but think of God. It was by no means in obvious harmony with it that he should have affirmed that we must, on moral grounds, retain a certain belief in God. Sir W. Hamilton and Dean Mansel followed Kant in holding that we can have no knowledge of God in Himself, as knowledge is only of the relative

and phenomenal. They strove to show that the notions of the unconditioned, the infinite, the absolute, are mere negations of thought, which destroy themselves by their mutual contradictions and by the absurdities which they involve. Yet both of these philosophers held that there is a revelation of God in Scripture and conscience, and that we are bound to believe it, not indeed as teaching us what God really is, but what He wishes us to believe concerning Him. Herbert Spencer, adopting Kant's theory of the limits of knowledge, and regarding as decisive Hamilton and Mansel's polemic against the philosophies of the Absolute, has concluded that the only truth underlying professed revelations, positive religions, and so-called theological science is the existence of an unknowable and unthinkable cause of all things. In the view of the Positivist the unknowable itself is a metaphysical fiction. The Kantian doctrine has had a still more extensive influence in Germany than in Britain, and German philosophers and theologians have displayed great ingenuity in their endeavours to combine with it some sort of recognition of God and of religion. Fries, De Wette, and others have relegated religion to the sphere of faith, Schleiermacher and his followers to that of feeling, Ritschl and his school to that of ethical wants, F. A. Lange to that of imagination, &c. Their common aim has been to find for piety towards God a special place which they can fence off from the rest of human nature, so as to be able to claim for religion independence of reason, speculation, and science, a right to existence even although necessarily

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ignorant of the object of its faith, feeling, moral sense, or phantasy.<sup>1</sup>

The movement indicated has led to no direct conclusion which has obtained, or is likely to obtain, general assent. It has had, however, a very important indirect result. It has shown how interested in, and dependent on, a true criticism or science of cognition are theism and theology. It has made increasingly manifest the immense significance to religion of the problem as to the powers and limits of thought which Kant stated and discussed with so much vigour and originality. Hence research into what the Germans call “die erkenntnisstheoretische Grundsätze”—the philosophical bases—of theism has been greatly stimulated and advanced by the movement. This is an enormous gain, which more than compensates for sundry incidental losses. Kant’s solution of the problem which he placed in the foreground of philosophy has not been found

<sup>1</sup> Among works in which it is denied that the real nature of God can be known are—Kant’s *Kr. d. r. V.*; Fichte’s *Kr. aller Offenbarung*; Schleiermacher’s *Reden, Dielektik*, and *Glaubenslehre*; Trendelenburg’s *Log. Untersuchungen*, ii. §§ xx.-xxiv.; Hamilton’s *Lect. on Met.*, and *Discussions*; Mansel’s *Bampton Lect.*, and *Philosophy of the Conditioned*; H. Spencer’s *First Principles*; and the writings of Lange, Ritschl, and other Neo-Kantists. Among works in which the real cognoscibility of God is affirmed are—Calderwood’s *Ph. of the Infinite*; C. Hodge’s *Sys. Th.*, i.; M’Cosh’s *Int. of the Mind, Phil. Series*, &c.; H. B. Smith’s *Intr. to Ch. Th.*, and *Faith and Philosophy*; Maurice’s *What is Revelation?* Young’s *Province of Reason*; and Harris’s *Phil. Bases of Theism*. See also L. Robert, *De la Certitude*, &c., 1880; Ollé-Laprune, *De la Certitude Morale*, 1880; G. Dorepas, *Les Théories de l’Inconnaissable*, 1883; G. Matheson, in *Can the Old Faith Live with the New?* 1885; R. T. Smith, *Man’s Knowledge of Man and of God*, 1886; Schramm, *Die Erkennbarkeit Gottes*, 1876; Bertling, *Die Erkennbarkeit Gottes*, 1885; Grung, *Das Problem der Gewissheit*, 1886; Milhaud, *Certitude logique*, 2nd ed., 1898; and, of course, Newman’s *Grammar of Assent*, 1870.



to be one in which the mind can rest. From his agnosticism down to the very empiricism which it was his aim to refute descent is logically inevitable. The agnosticism of piety has in no form been able to discover a halting-place,—a spot on which to raise theism or any solid religious construction. In no form has it been able to prove its legitimacy, to maintain its self-consistency, or to defend itself successfully against the agnosticism of unbelief. It is, therefore, not surprising that it should have been very generally regarded as dangerous to theism in reality, even when friendly to it in intention. Yet there is much in the theory of cognition on which it proceeds which the theist can utilise. Indeed, no theory of cognition can afford a satisfactory basis to theism which does not largely adopt and assimilate that of Kant. He has conclusively shown that all our knowledge is a synthesis of contingent impressions and necessary conditions; that without the latter there can be neither sense, understanding, nor reason; that they constitute intelligence, and are the light of mind; that they also pervade the whole world of experience and illuminate it; that there is neither thing nor thought in the universe which does not exhibit them in some of their aspects; that apart from them there can be no reality, no truth, no science. The agnostic corollaries appended to this theory by Kant and others, instead of being necessary consequences from it, are inconsistent with it.

Kant and the agnostics say that we know only the conditioned; but what they prove is that we know also the conditions of thought, and that these condi-

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tions are themselves unconditioned, otherwise they would not be necessary. They affirm that we can know only the phenomenal and relative; but what they establish is that it is as impossible to know only the relative and phenomenal as to know only the absolute and noumenal, and that in so far as we know at all we know through ideas which are absolute and noumenal in the only intelligible, and in a very real and important sense. They maintain, what is very true, if not a truism, that the categories are only valid for experience, and they imply that this is because experience limits and defines the categories, whereas, according to their own theory, it is the categories which condition experience and enter as constituents into all experience; so that to say that the categories are only valid for experience means very little, experience merely existing so far as the categories enable us to have it, and being valid so far as the categories are legitimately applied, although not farther, which leaves no more presumption against religious experience than against sensible experience.

They have denied the objective validity of the categories or necessary conditions of thought. This denial is the distinctive feature of all modern agnosticism; and the theist who would vindicate the reality of his knowledge of God, the legitimacy of his belief in God, the worth of his religious experience, must refute the reasonings by which it has been supported; show that consciousness testifies against it, the subjectivity of any true category being unthinkable and inconceivable; and indicate how its admission must

subvert not only the foundation of theology but that of all other sciences, and resolve them all into castles in the air, or into such stuff as dreams are made of. In the accomplishment of this task as much guidance and aid may be found, perhaps, in the theories of cognition of Ferrier and Rosmini as from those of any of the Germans; but Hegel and his followers, not a few of the Herbartists, Ulrici, Harms, and many other German thinkers, have contributed to show the falsity of the critical theory at this point. Amended here, it is a theory admirably fitted to be the cornerstone of a philosophical theism.

More may be attempted to be done in the region of the necessary and unconditioned. The conditions of thought, the categories of experience, the ideas of reason are all linked together, so that each has its own place and is part of a whole. And of what whole? The idea of God. All the metaphysical categories are included therein, for God is the Absolute Being; all the physical categories, for He is Absolute Force and Life; all the mental categories, for He is Absolute Spirit; all the moral categories, for He is the Absolutely Good. The idea of God is the richest, the most inclusive, the most comprehensive of all ideas. It is the idea of ideas, for it takes up all other ideas into itself and gives them unity, so that they constitute a system. The whole system issues into, and is rendered organic by, the idea of God, which, indeed, contains within itself all the ideas which are the conditions of human reason and the grounds of known existence. All sciences, and even all phases and varieties of human experience, are only

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developments of some of the ideas included in this supreme and all-comprehensive idea, and the developments have in no instance exhausted the ideas. Hence in the idea of God must be the whole truth of the universe as well as of the mind. These sentences are an attempt to express in the briefest intelligible form what it was the aim of the so-called philosophy of the Absolute to prove to be not only true, but *the truth*.

Hegel and Schelling, Krause and Baader, and their associates, all felt themselves to have the one mission in life of making manifest that God was thus the truth, the light of all knowledge, self-revealing in all science, the sole object of all philosophy. The Absolute with which they occupied themselves so earnestly was no abstraction, no fiction, such as Hamilton and Mansel supposed it to be,—not the wholly indeterminate, not that which is out of all relation to everything or to anything, not the Unknowable,—but the ground of all relationship, the foundation alike of existence and of thought, that which it is not only not impossible to know, but which it is impossible not to know, the knowledge of its being implied in all knowledge. Hegel expressed not only his own conviction, but the central and vital thought of the whole anti-agnostic movement which culminated in him when he wrote, “The object of religion is, like that of philosophy, the eternal truth itself in its objective existence: it is God, and nothing but God, and the explanation of God. Philosophy is not a wisdom of the world, but a knowledge of the unworldly; not a knowledge of outward matter, of em-

pirical being and life, but knowledge of that which is eternal, of that which is God and which flows from His nature, as that must manifest and develop itself. Hence philosophy in explaining religion explains itself, and in explaining itself explains religion. Philosophy and religion thus coincide in that they have one and the same object." The adherents of the philosophy of the Absolute must be admitted to have fallen, in their revulsion from agnosticism, into many extravagances of gnosticism; but a theist who does not sympathise with their main aim, and even accept most of the results as to which they are agreed, cannot be credited with having much philosophical insight into what a thorough and consistent theism implies. A God who is not the Absolute as they understood the term, not the Unconditioned revealed in all that is conditioned, and the essential content of all knowledge at its highest, cannot be the God either of a profound philosophy or a fully developed religion. The philosophy of the Absolute was, on the whole, a great advance towards a philosophical theism.<sup>1</sup>

And yet it was largely pantheistic, and tended strongly towards pantheism. This was not surprising. Any philosophy which is in thorough earnest to show that God is the ground of all existence and the con-

<sup>1</sup> On the doctrine of God propounded by the philosophers of the Absolute may be consulted the histories of philosophy by Chalybäus, Michelet, Erdmann, Ueberweg, K. Fischer, Harms, Zeller, &c., also Pünjer, ii. bks. 3 and 5; the chapters in Pfleiderer on Schelling, Hegel, Neo-Schellingianism, and Neo-Hegelianism; Dorner's *Hist. of Prot. Th.*, ii. 257, 395; Lichtemberger's *Hist. des Idées Religieuses en Allemagne*, &c., *passim*; Ehrenhaus's *Hegel's Gottesbegriff*, &c.; Franz on Schelling's *Positive Philosophie*; Opzoomer's *Leer van God*; K. Ph. Fischer's *Charakteristik der Theosophie Baaders*; Seydel's *Religious-philosophie*; &c.

dition of all knowledge must find it difficult to retain a firm grasp of the personality and transcendence of the Divine and to set them forth with due prominence. Certainly some of the most influential representatives of the philosophy of the Absolute ignored or misrepresented them. The consequence was, however, that a band of thinkers soon appeared who were animated with the most zealous desire to do justice to these aspects of the Absolute, and to make evident the onesidedness and inadequacy of every pantheistic conception of the Divine. This was the common aim of those who gathered around the younger Fichte, and whose literary organ was the *Zeitschrift für Philosophie*. Chalybäus, K. Ph. Fischer, Sengler, Weisse, Wirth, and Ulrici may be named as among the ablest and most active. The Roman Catholic Günther and his followers worked in much the same spirit. Lotze has effectively co-operated by his ingenious defence of the thesis that "perfect personality is to be found only in God, while in all finite spirits there exists only a weak imitation of personality; the finiteness of the finite is not a productive condition of personality, but rather a limiting barrier to its perfect development." This movement also, then, has tended to develop and contributed to enrich the theory of theism. Its special mission has been to prove that theism is wider than pantheism, and can include all the truth in pantheism, while pantheism must necessarily exclude truth in theism essential to the vitality and vigour both of religion and of morality.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See art. "Theismus," by Ulrici, in Herzog's *Real-Encyclopädie*, xv. As representing this phase of theism the following works may be named:—C. H. Weisse's *Idee der Gottheit*, 1844, and *Philoso-*



The philosophy of the Absolute, judged of from a distinctly theistic point of view, was defective on another side. It regarded too exclusively the necessary and formal in thought, trusted almost entirely to its insight into the significance of the categories and its powers of rational deduction. Hence the idea of the Divine which it attained, if vast and comprehensive, was also vague and abstract, shadowy and unimpressive. Correction was needed on this side also, and it came through Schleiermacher and that large company of theologians, among whom Lipsius, Franck, and Ritschl have been the most prominent, who have dwelt on the importance of proceeding from immediate personal experience, from the direct testimony of pious feeling, from the practical needs of the moral life, &c. From these theologians may be learned that God is to be known, not through mere intellectual cognition, but through spiritual experience, and that no dicta as to the Divine not verifiable in experience, not efficacious to sustain piety and to promote virtue, to elevate and purify the heart, to invigorate the will, to ennoble the character, to sanctify both individuals and communities, are likely to be true. Experience of the Divine can be the richest and surest experience only if it not merely implies all that is absolute and necessary in consciousness

*phische Dogmatik*, 1855; Wirth's *Speculative Idee Gottes*, 1845; Sengler's *Idee Gottes*, 1845-47; J. H. Fichte's *Speculative Theologie*, 1846-47; Hanne's *Idee der absoluten Persönlichkeit*, 1867; Ulrici's *Gott u. die Natur*, 1875; and Lotze's *Microcosmos*, ii. ix. 4-5 (Eng. tr.). The school is well represented in America by Prof. Bowne. See his *Studies in Theism*, especially ch. 7-9. See also art. of Prof. J. S. Candlish on "The Personality of God," in *Princeton Rev.*, Sept. 1884, and of Gardiner on "Lotze's Theistic Philosophy," in *Presby. Rev.*, Oct. 1885.

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and existence, but is also confirmed and guaranteed by all that is relative and contingent therein.

What are known as "the proofs" for the Divine existence have from the time of Kant to the present been often represented as sophistical or useless. This view is, however, less prevalent than it was. During the last twenty years the proofs have been in much greater repute, and have had far more labour expended on them, than during the previous part of last century. They have, of course, been considerably modified, in conformity with the general growth of thought and knowledge. For instance, they are no longer presented elaborately analysed into series or groups of syllogisms. It is recognised that the fetters which would assuredly arrest the progress of physical and mental science cannot be favourable to that of theology. It is recognised that the validity of the proofs must be entirely dependent on the truthfulness with which they indicate the modes in which God reveals Himself, the facts through which man apprehends the presence and attributes of God, and that, therefore, the more simply they are stated the better. Man knows God somewhat as he knows the minds of his fellow-men—namely, inferentially—yet through an experience at once so simple and so manifold that all attempts at a syllogistic representation of the process must necessarily do it injustice. The closeness and character of the connection of the proofs have also come to be more clearly seen. They are perceived to constitute an organic whole of argument, each of them establishing its separate element, and thus contributing to the general result—

confirmatory evidence *that* God is, and complementary evidence as to *what* God is. The explanation of this doubtless is that the apprehension of God is itself an organic whole, a complex and harmonious process, involving all that is essential in the human mind, yet all the constituents of which are so connected that they may be embraced in a single act and coalesce into one grand issue.

The cosmological argument concludes from the existence of the world as temporal and contingent, conditioned and phenomenal, to the existence of God as its one eternal, unconditioned, self-existent cause. It is an argument which has been in no respect discredited by recent research and discussion, which is in substance accepted not only by theists but by pantheists, and which forms the basis even of the philosophy of Herbert Spencer. The principle on which it proceeds—the principle of causality—has only come to be more clearly seen to be ultimate, universal, and necessary. The hypothesis of an infinite series of causes and effects has not had its burden of irrationality in the least diminished. The progress of science has not tended to show that the world itself may be reasonably regarded as eternal and self-existent; in the view of theists it has only tended to render more probable the doctrine that all physical things must have their origin in a single non-physical cause. The necessity of determining aright the bearings of the new views reached or suggested by science as to the ultimate constitution of matter, the conservation of energy, cosmic evolution, the age and duration of the present physical system, &c., has

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been the chief factor in the latest developments of the argument *a contingentia mundi*. The teleological argument, which concludes from the regularities and adjustments, pre-conformities and harmonies in nature, that its first cause must be an intelligence, has been both corrected and extended owing to recent advances of science and especially of biological science. The theory of evolution has not shaken the principle or lessened the force of the argument, while it has widened its scope and opened up vistas of grander design, but it has so changed its mode of presentation that already the *Bridgewater Treatises* and similar works are to a considerable extent antiquated. Perhaps the most promising of the later applications of the argument is that which rests on the results obtained by a philosophical study of history, and which seeks to show that the goal of the evolution of life, so far as it has yet proceeded, is the perfecting of human nature, and the eternal source of things a power which makes for truth and righteousness. The ethical argument—the proof from conscience and the moral order—held a very subordinate place in the estimation of writers on natural theology until Kant rested on it almost the whole weight of theism. It has ever since been prominent, and has been the argument most relied on to produce practical conviction. Much importance is now rarely attached to those forms of the metaphysical argument which are deductions from a particular conception, as, *e.g.*, of a perfect being. Ignorance alone, however, can account for the assertion often met with that the argument is generally abandoned. It

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has only been transformed. It has passed from a stage in which it was presented in particular ontological forms into one in which it is set forth in a general epistemological form. As at present maintained, it is to the effect that God is the idea of ideas, the ultimate in human thought, without whom all thought is confusion and self-contradiction. In this form, by what theologians and religious philosophers possessed of much speculative insight is it not held? <sup>1</sup>

The changes adopted in the methods of theistic proof have all tended in one direction—namely, to remove or correct extreme and exaggerated conceptions of the Divine transcendence and to produce a true appreciation of the Divine immanence,—to set aside deism and to enrich theism with what is good in pantheism. The general movement of religious speculation within the theistic area has been towards mediation between the extremes of pantheism and of deism, towards harmonious combination of the personal self-equality and the universal agency of the Divine. Positive science has powerfully co-operated with speculation in giving support and impulse to this movement. While the modern scientific view of the world does not result in pantheism, it affords it a partial and relative justification, and requires a theism which, while maintaining the personality of God, recognises God to be in all things, and all things to be of God, through God, and to God. It may be said that theism has always thus recognised the Divine immanence. The vague recognition of

<sup>1</sup> See the present writer's *Theism*, and the indications of the literature given in the notes. [Dr. Hutchison Stirling's Gifford Lectures are of special value in connection with the theistic proofs.]

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it, however, which precedes scientific insight and the conquest and absorption of pantheism, is not to be identified with the realising comprehension of it which is their result.<sup>1</sup>

As to the further treatment of the idea of God in recent or contemporary theology, the following may be mentioned as, perhaps, the chief distinctive features: first, the general endeavour to present the idea as a harmonious reflex of the Divine nature and life, instead of as a mere aggregate of attributes; secondly, and consequently, the greater care shown in the classification and correlation of the attributes, so as to refer them to their appropriate places in the one great organic thought; and thirdly, the more truly ethical and spiritual representation given of the Divine character. To realise the nature and import of the first of these features it is only necessary to compare the expositions given of the idea of God in the works of such theologians as Nitzsch, Thomasius, Dorner, Philippi, Kahnis, and even more in those of the representatives of German speculative theism, with such as are to be found in the treatises of Hill, Watson, Wardlaw, and Hodge, which, although published in the last century, express only the views of an earlier age. As to the second point, there has of late been a vast amount of thought expended in endeavouring so to classify and co-ordinate the attributes, and so to refer them to the various moments of the Divine

<sup>1</sup> See the extremely interesting papers by Peabody, Montgomery, Howison, and Harris in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* for Oct 1885, on the question, "Is Pantheism the Legitimate Outcome of Modern Science?" Also F. E. Abbot's *Scientific Theism*, 1885, and J. Fiske's *Idea of God as affected by Modern Knowledge*, 1885.



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existence and life, as that God may be able to be apprehended both in His unity and completeness, self-identity and spiritual richness, as one whole harmonious and perfect personality. Of the work attempted in this direction our limits will not allow us to treat. In regard to the third feature, any one who will peruse an essay like Weber's *Vom Zorne Gottes*, or Ritschl's *De Ira Dei*, and compares the way in which the Biblical conception of the wrath of God is there presented with the mode of exhibiting it prevalent for so many ages, is likely to be convinced that considerable progress has been made even in recent times in the study of the moral aspects of God's character. That the Divine glory must centre in moral perfection, in holy love, is a thought which is undoubtedly being realised by all theists with ever-increasing clearness and fulness.<sup>1</sup>

It follows from the above that theistic thought has been moving in a direction which could not fail to suggest to those influenced by it that a rigidly unitarian conception of God must be inadequate, and that the trinitarian conception might be the only one in which reason can rest as self-consistent. So long as the simplicity of the Divine nature was conceived of as an abstract self-identity, intelligence could not venture to attempt to pass from the unity to the trinity of the Godhead, or hope for any glimpse of the possibility of harmoniously combining them. But

<sup>1</sup> Bruch, *Lehre von den Göttl. Eigenschaften*, 1842; Moll, *De Justo Attributorum Dei Discrimine*, 1855 [Both are, however, now inadequate. Among the most interesting and suggestive classifications of the Divine Attributes are those of Schleiermacher, Nietzsche, Twisten, Kahnis, Philippi, Schweizer, Dörner, Breckenridge, and Cocker.]

this view of the simplicity of the Divine nature having been abandoned, and an idea of God attained which assigns to Him all the distinctions compatible with, and demanded by, completeness and perfection of personality, the doctrine of the Trinity necessarily entered on a new stage of its history. The free movement of thought in the last century, far from expelling it from its place in the mind of Christendom, has caused it to strike deeper root and grow with fresh vigour. Never since the Nicene age has theological speculation been so actively occupied with the constitution of the Godhead, and with the trinitarian representation thereof, as from the commencement of the past century. It is, of course, impossible here to describe any of the attempts which, during this period, have been made to show that the absolute Divine self-consciousness implies a trinitarian form of existence, and that intelligently to think of the essential Trinity is to think of those moments in the Divine existence without which personality and self-consciousness are unthinkable; or that a worthy conception of Divine love demands a trinitarian mode of life; or that a world distinct from God presupposes that God as triune is in and for Himself a perfect and infinite world, so that His attributes and activities already fully realised in the trinitarian life can proceed outwards, not of necessity but of absolute freedom; or that the whole universe is a manifestation of His triune nature, and all finite spiritual life a reflection of the archetypal life, self-sustained and self-fulfilled therein. All the more thoughtful trinitarian divines of the present endeavour to make it

apparent that the doctrine of the Trinity is not one which has been merely imposed upon faith by external authority, but one which satisfies reason, gives expression to the self-evidencing substance of revelation, and explains and supports religious experience. If it be thought that their success has not been great, it has to be remembered that they have been labouring near the commencement of a movement, and so at a stage when all individual efforts can have only a very limited worth. To one general conclusion they all seem to have come—namely, that the idea of God as substance is not the only idea with which we can connect, or in which we may find implied, tri-personality. The category of substance is, in some respects, one very inapplicable to God, as the philosophy of Spinoza has indirectly shown. If the theologians referred to be correct, the doctrine of the Trinity is not specially dependent upon it. In their view God cannot be thought of consistently as, *e.g.*, Absolute Life, Absolute Intelligence, or Absolute Love, unless He be thought of in a trinitarian manner.

While trinitarian theism has thus during the past century shown abundant vitality and vigour, it cannot be said to have gained any decided victory over unitarian theism. The latter has also within the same period spread more widely and shown more practical activity, more spiritual life, than in any former age. The unitarianism represented by a Martineau was a manifest advance on that which had been represented even by a Priestley. Theism in its unitarian form is the creed of very many of the most

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cultured and most religious minds of our time, alike in Europe and America. In this form it has also signally shown its power in contemporary India. Brahmoism is, perhaps, the most remarkable example of a unitarian theism which exhibits all the characteristics of a positive faith and a churchly organisation. The unitarian theism of the present age is distinguished by the great variety of its kinds or types. None of these, it must be added, are very definite or stable. Hence unitarian theism is often seen to approximate to, or become absorbed into, agnosticism or pantheism, cosmism or humanitarianism. This may be due, however, less to its own character than to the character of the age.<sup>1</sup>

The mind of man has clearly not yet ceased to be intensely interested in thoughts of God. There are no grounds apparent for supposing that it will ever cease to seek after Him or to strive to enlarge its knowledge of His ways. And, if the idea of God be what has been suggested in the foregoing pages, the search for God cannot fail to meet with an ever-growing response. If the idea of God be the most comprehensive of ideas, inclusive of all the categories of thought and implicative of their harmonious synthesis and perfect realisation, all thought and experience must of its very nature tend to lead onwards to a fuller knowledge of God. For the knowledge of God, on this view, consists in no mere inference reached through a process of theological argumenta-

<sup>1</sup> Goblet d'Alviella, *Contemporary Evolution of Religious Thought in England, America, and India*, 1885.

The unitarian theism of to day is admirably represented in Upton's *Hibbert Lectures*, 1894, and Armstrong's *God and the Soul*, 1896.

tion, but in an ever-growing apprehension of an ever-advancing self-revelation of God; and all philosophy, science, experience, and history must necessarily work together to promote it.

All speculative thought, whether professedly metaphysical or professedly theological, is conversant with ideas included in the idea of God. It deals with what is necessary in and to thought; and within that sphere, notwithstanding many aberrations, it has made slow but sure progress. The history of philosophical speculation is not only, like the whole history of man, essentially rational, but it is, in substance, the history of reason itself in its purest form,—not the record of an accidental succession of opinions, but of the progressive apprehension by reason of God's revelation of Himself in its own constitution. “There is much in the history of speculative thought, just as in the outward life of man, that belongs to the accidental and irrational—errors, vagaries, paradoxes, whimsicalities, assuming in all ages the name and the guise of philosophy. But, just as the student of the constitutional history of England can trace, amidst all the complexity and contingency of outward and passing events, through successive times and dynasties, underneath the waywardness of individual passion and the struggle for ascendancy of classes and orders, the silent, steady development of that system of ordered freedom which we name the constitution of England, so, looking back on the course which human thought has travelled, we shall be at no loss to discern beneath the surface change of opinions, unaffected by the abnormal displays of

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individual folly and unreason, the traces of a continuous onward movement of mind.”<sup>1</sup> And this continuous onward movement is towards the clearer and wider apprehension of the whole system of ultimate truths which is comprehended in the idea of the Absolute Truth. The thoughts of men as to God are necessarily enlarged by increase of insight into the conditions of their own thinking. The disquisitions of merely professional theologians on the nature and attributes of God have done far less to elucidate the idea of God than the philosophical views of great speculative thinkers, and would have done less than they have actually accomplished were it not for the guidance and suggestion found in these views.

The sciences co-operate with speculative philosophy and with one another in aiding thought to grow in the knowledge of God. The greatness, the power, the wisdom, the goodness of the God of creation and providence must be increasingly apprehended in the measure that nature and its course, humanity and its history, are apprehended; and that measure is given us in the stage of development attained by the sciences. “God’s glory in the heavens,” for example, is in some degree visible to the naked eye and uninstructed intellect, but it becomes more perceptible and more impressive with every discovery of astronomy. Not otherwise is it as regards all the sciences. Each of them has its distinctive and appropriate contribution to bring towards the completion of the revelation of God, and cannot withhold it.

<sup>1</sup> Principal Caird, *Progressiveness of the Sciences*, pp. 27, 28, Glasgow, 1875.



## AGNOSTICISM AS TO KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

But the idea of God is not one which can be rightly apprehended merely through intellect speculatively exercised or operating on the findings of science. It requires to be also apprehended through moral experience and the discipline of life. Neither individuals nor communities can know more of God as a moral being than their moral condition and character permit them to know. The apprehension of God and the sense of moral distinctions and moral obligations condition each other and correspond to each other. History shows us that sincere and pious men may receive as a supernaturally revealed truth the declaration that God is love, and yet hold that His love is very limited, being real only to a favoured class, and that He has foreordained, for His mere good pleasure, millions of the human race to eternal misery. How was such inconsistency possible? Largely because these men, notwithstanding their sincerity and piety, were lacking in that love to man through experience of which alone God's love can be truly apprehended. In like manner, it is not only the science of law which cannot advance more rapidly than the sense of justice, but also theology so far as it treats of the righteousness of God. Thus the knowledge of God is conditioned and influenced by the course of man's moral experience.

The same may be said of the distinctively religious experience. In it also there has been a continuous discovery and a continuous disclosure of God. It is not long since the ethnic religions were very generally regarded as merely stages of human folly, so many monuments of aversion to God and of depart-

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ure from the truth as to God. It was supposed that they were adequately described when they were called "idolatries" and "superstitions." This view rested on a strangely unworthy conception both of human nature and of Divine providence, and is fast passing away. In its place has come the conviction that the history of religion has been essentially a process of search for God on the part of man, and a process of self-revelation on the part of God to man, resulting in a continuous widening and deepening of human apprehension of the Divine. All, indeed, has not been progress in the history of religion either in the ethnic or Christian period; much has been the reverse; but all stages of religion testify that man has been seeking and finding God, and God making Himself known unto man.

But, while knowledge of God may reasonably be expected unceasingly to grow, in all the ways which have been indicated, from more to more, it is not to be supposed that doubt or denial of God's existence must therefore speedily disappear. Religious agnosticism cannot fail to remain long prevalent. The very wealth of contents in the idea of God inevitably exposes the idea to the assaults of agnosticism. All kinds of agnosticism merge into agnosticism as to God, from the very fact that all knowledge implies and may contribute to the knowledge of God. The more comprehensive an idea is, from the more points can it be assailed; and the idea of God, being comprehensive of all ultimate ideas, may be assailed through them all—as, for example, through the idea of being, or of infinity, or of causality, or of personality,

or of rectitude. Then, in another way, the uniqueness of the idea of God explains the prevalence of agnosticism in regard to it. The ideas are not precisely in God what they are in man or nature. God is being as man or nature is not; for He is independent and necessary being, and in that sense the one true Being. God is not limited by time and space as creatures are; for, whereas duration and extension merely are predicates of creatures, the corresponding attributes of God are eternity and immensity. God as first cause is a cause in a higher and more real sense than any second cause. So as to personality, intelligence, holiness, love. Just because the idea of God is thus elevated in all respects, there are many minds which fail or refuse to rise up to it, and which because of its very truth reject it as not true at all. They will not hear of that Absolute Truth which is simply the idea of God; but that they reject it is their misfortune, not any argument against the truth itself.

It will be seen from the foregoing extract that much which I have desired to do in connection with Natural Theology has as yet hardly been even attempted by me. That I shall accomplish all that I began by aiming at is very unlikely, but that causes me little regret, as I feel sure that many others will follow on the same lines, and advance much farther than I have been able to do.









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